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ABSTRACT

Concerns over the high incidence of divorce and domestic violence have prompted many Australian churches and some nonchurch agencies to offer premarriage education programs (PMEPs) to couples planning to marry. Unlike past PMEPs, which were often didactic, Australia's present-day PMEPs tend to be learner-centered programs that encourage participants to reflect on their relationships and marriage and develop the skills needed to build marriages. In the 1970s, educators and coordinators of Australia's PMEPs formed two professional associations to protect, promote, and improve premarriage education (PME). In 1991, the Australian Attorney General's Department funded a comprehensive evaluation of PME. Nearly 1,000 Australian couples who had participated in PMEPs during the first quarter of 1992 were surveyed regarding their views of marriage and PME and the effects of participation in a PMEP. The survey results were synthesized into the following categories: teaching about marriage; dimensions of premarriage education; PMEPs in the 1990s; demographic characteristics and attitudes of PMEP educators and participants; the effects of participation in PME; and challenges facing PME. (Forty-four tables/figures are included. Appended are the survey instruments and tables summarizing the survey results. Contains 56 references.) (MN)

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Love, Sex and Waterskiing

The Experience of Pre-Marriage Education in Australia

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The Experience of Pre-Marriage Education in Australia

Roger Harris, Michele Simons,
Peter Willis and Anne Barrie

Adelaide 1992

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Acknowledgements

Love, Sex and Waterskiing is the culmination of a long held ambition of a large number of people involved in the field of marriage education to undertake research on how pre-marriage education programs are received by couples who attend them and some of their possible outcomes. In this sense, the book represents the endeavours of a large team of people to whom we would like to extend our gratitude.

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Roger, Michele, Peter and Anne

Foreword

A book on pre-marriage education raises a number of questions; questions that to some would suggest there is no need to read this book. For example:

> *Is marriage a private or a public institution? If it is private, should outsiders meddle in it at all? Why should governments spend taxpayers' money on this unwarranted meddling?*
>
> *Is it possible to evaluate pre-marriage education? And if it is not possible, perhaps pre-marriage education should not be done at all as the possible dangers may outweigh the potential good.*
>
> *And what on earth would such education consist of? Rows of men writing out one hundred times, 'I will not put work before my family', or women promising to obey and not answer back and practising how to make apple pie?*
>
> *Some would question whether marriage is still important. Isn't it just a piece of paper, a remnant of an old-fashioned ritual?*
>
> *In any case, there is no doubt that marriage is an institution that is going through change. How does one educate for marriage when there are such different ideas of what marriage is?*
>
> *A widespread belief is that the common practice of couples living together before marriage is of itself the best preparation for marriage. Doesn't living together do away with any need to devise gimmicky and unnatural 'courses' of marriage preparation?*

I believe this is an important book that deserves to be read, and that the answers to the above questions are not as simple and obvious as is sometimes thought. I shall begin with the last question, that of living together doing away with the need for pre-marriage or early marriage education.

A recent study by John Haskey in the summer 1992 issue of the U.K. journal *Population Trends* has thrown this latter belief into question. Haskey shows that of couples who married for the first time early in the 1980s, those who had previously cohabited were 50 percent more likely than the others to have divorced after eight years of marriage. Haskey himself points out that what he is describing is a correlation. We do not know whether (and if so how) these facts are causally related. But they do throw some cold water on the idea that cohabitation in itself is a good form of marriage preparation.

The February 1992 issue of *Scientific American* carried an article that relates to the first question which challenges the notion of pre-marriage education because marriage is an essentially private relationship. This article reports and explores how the children of Indochinese refugees are achieving remarkable success in American schools. Educational researchers visited Japanese and Taiwanese schools in an effort to discover the foundations of this amazing achievement. The Lao, Vietnamese and Chinese-Vietnamese children had missed months or years of schooling and had lived in relocation camps. They and their families had had little exposure to Western culture before they arrived in the U.S.A. They knew virtually no English when they arrived. Often the families came with no more than the clothes they stood up in. They attended low-income, inner-city schools, ones not known for outstanding academic achievement. Yet the children quickly adapted to their new schools and began to excel.

Researchers at the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor found that the explanation of the 'stunning' successes of these Indochinese refugee children was to be found, not in the schools of the countries they had come from, but *in their families*. The influences that had the power to overcome poor English skills, poverty, physical and emotional trauma and the disruptive environment of urban schools, were family and cultural ones. The researchers found that the Vietnamese, Lao and Chinese-Vietnamese families they studied were imbued with values from deep within the Buddhist and Confucian traditions of East and Southeast Asia.

In these families, parents and children honour mutual, collective obligations to one another and to their relatives. They strive to attain respect, cooperation and harmony within the family. They find both learning and imparting knowledge to be satisfying and gratifying, not drudgery. Their gratification comes from the importance placed on effort rather than ability. Their strong sense of control and efficacy was not an individual efficacy but was linked to family efficacy. The family's ability to link past, present and future seems to have imparted a sense of direction to the lives of these people.

The only surprising thing in the article on the success of Indochinese refugees in the U.S.A. is that educational researchers went to Indochina to study the schools assuming that this is where they would find the foundations of the children's success. Research in the U.S.A., Australia and other countries has shown for years that differences in children's school achievement are explained much more by differences in families than by differences between schools. (However, there has been a failure to take in a finding that gives such educational clout to an informal group outside the educational establishment.)

As the writers of the study of Indochinese children conclude, 'the American school system - despite widespread criticism - has retained its capacity to teach, as it has shown with these refugees'. But it is clear from this study, and from many that have preceded it over a period of thirty years, that schools are successful only when they work in partnership with families. The children

who are able to benefit from what schools have to offer come from families with internal resources - resources of values, culture, relationships and mutual respect. These internal resources are real factors with a powerful impact on educational outcomes.

I have given an example of how marriage and family impacts on children's education. I could equally have given examples of how marriage and family impact on mental health, physical health, and happiness and contentment. If education and mental and physical health are public, social issues, then marriage and family, too, are (at least in part) public issues. It makes no sense to keep pouring resources into one end of the educational partnership (the school and university) and to ignore and treat as 'unteachable' the family, the other partner. The very act of pouring funds into formal schools and ignoring families (as if they don't exist or as if they make no contribution) gives a powerful message to family members that it doesn't matter very much how they conduct themselves at home, that it is the school that makes the big impact on their children's educational success.

The cultural and family values, attitudes and skills that have been identified in accounting for the success of Southeast Asian children in U.S.A. schools (and also for the success of mainstream children in schools) are the very values, attitudes and skills that are taught in pre-marriage education programs. There is reason to think that key transition points in the family life-cycle, such as marriage, are times when people are particularly open to learning those values, skills and attitudes that make such pervasive effects on individual and communal well-being. So this project of pre-marriage education, taking place on the very margins of the educational establishment, may well be addressing issues that go to the heart of modern educational dilemmas.

The questions of how to evaluate pre-marriage education, how you can educate for marriage when marriage is in such a state of change, and what on earth is pre-marriage education anyway are explored and made much more transparent by this study.

This is the first attempt to evaluate pre-marriage education nationally. (It has been preceded only by a handful of attempts to evaluate individual programs.) It puts a pin-prick in the balloon of the myth that 'it is impossible to evaluate pre-marriage education'. Perhaps this myth is based on an exaggeration of the difference in complexity between evaluating pre-marriage education and other forms of education.

The researchers divided their inquiry into two tasks. The first task was to map the field, to discover and document just what is being done in the way of pre-marriage education in Australia and by whom. They have identified, described and analysed pre-marriage education throughout Australia, their programs, educators and couples. This alone is a great contribution to understanding and reflecting on the questions raised above.

The second task was to discover the couples' experiences of pre-marriage education and the differences they thought the programs had made to their relationship, their ideas of marriage and their intention to marry.

They indicate the variety of what is being done, the variety of understandings of what pre-marriage education is and ought to be. Ideas and beliefs about marriage are inextricably linked to cultural and other beliefs and values. As the churches are the main providers of pre-marriage education, the majority of these couples are planning a church wedding. However, only 21 percent attended church weekly and 15 percent monthly; almost two-thirds seldom or never went to church.

They show how the different understandings of church impact on the type of pre-marriage education that is offered. Even within the one church, pre-marriage education differs widely if it is set within the context of the social welfare arm of the church or the religious arm. It seems that there will always be a need for a variety of programs catering to the rich variety of beliefs and cultures in Australia.

The wide variety of training and preparation for the role of pre-marriage educator also emerges. But one fact stands out clearly. Virtually none of the educators received their training for their role in a tertiary institute. If marriage is a valued social and cultural institution, and if marriage contributes to individual and community well-being, and if being a spouse and a parent is one of our most important adult roles, should not education for marriage and parenthood be an espoused goal of our educational systems?

A number of concerns are raised. The older participant couples had a much higher level of dissatisfaction than others. How should people be selected and trained for the role of pre-marriage educator? Those who are living together seem to feel that they know it all already: how are they to be met where they are? There was a perceived need to improve the educational processes. There is a tension at times between the Church's interest and the interest of pre-marriage education.

Some clear outcomes have been identified. Despite the fact that many of the couples come reluctantly to fulfil a requirement which will allow them to be married in the church of their choice, there is a very high level of satisfaction with the organisation, structure and experiences of the programs. Components on communication and conflict resolution are particularly appreciated. Eighty-three percent of couples believe they had learnt new skills and benefitted from the program.

On reading *Love, Sex and Waterskiing*, I find myself wondering whether pre-marriage or marriage education is a national concern or just a church concern? It is sometimes assumed that marriage is something of interest or of value only

to church people, as if marriage were something invented by the churches. But Arnold van Gennep's classic work on rites of passage includes marriage as one of the universal rites of passage along with birth, initiation and death. In other words, marriage is a human institution, far preceding the establishment of the church, to be found in virtually every culture, always surrounded by myths and taboos and celebrated with ritual. Certainly I do not find that non-church people place any less value on marriage than do church members.

It seems at the moment that only the churches can provide pre-marriage education. Yet by far the majority of couples, even though many came only to fulfil a requirement that would enable them to be married in the church of their choice, claimed that they had learned valuable skills that were in fact helping them in their relationship. How can this valuable experience be made available to others in the community in a way that is congruent with their cultural values?

One educator, when asked what concerns were held concerning the pre-marriage education program under scrutiny, responded 'a lack of national standards, a lack of financial support and a lack of first class training'. They are concerns that I think anyone who values marriage and believes it is possible to enhance and resource people's experience of marriage would have in relation to the current resourcing and practice of pre-marriage education.

This book has taken a major step in addressing those concerns. Its appearance marks a new maturity and professionalism in the field of pre-marriage education. It deserves to be read and reflected on. I expect it to be of especial interest to all those involved in the work of pre-marriage education. It will also be of interest to those who appreciate that marriage is one of our valued social and cultural institutions, and that it contributes to the well-being of individuals and the whole community.

Moira Eastman
Author of *Family: The Vital Factor*
Melbourne

Chapter 1

Introduction

Love, Sex and Water Skiing is the book of a national project on pre-marriage education programs in Australia. The eye-catching title was provided by one aquatic respondent's lighthearted views of the benefits of marriage but the image it conveyed carried such wonderful symbolism that it has ended up on the cover of this book. The image is of a couple, whizzing along at high speed having surmounted the initial challenges involved in getting up and going (and pulled by forces whose direction and force is often outside their immediate control), blissfully happy while everything is going well but aware (or not aware as the case may be) that the balance and security they have achieved is maintained only by constant adjustment, plenty of nerve, mutual support and the ability to survive an occasional ducking.

Marriage and pre-marriage education programs

Australian couples continue to marry in large numbers but some find moving from the happiness of their wedding to a durable and satisfying marriage a challenge for which they are ill prepared. Many churches and some non-church agencies, concerned by the numbers of divorces and the incidence of domestic violence, and supported increasingly by government, have offered forms of marriage preparation to couples planning to marry.

Besides individual pre-marriage orientation offered to couples usually by the minister chosen to officate at their wedding or another minister, group programs called pre-marriage education programs (PMEPs) have been developed in Australia usually but not exclusively by the churches. They developed from earlier group programs set up shortly after the second world war and have grown strongly since that time. These are the concern of this study.

The approaches of PMEPs have developed from earlier, more didactic sessions consisting of lectures from experts which tended to focus on the responsibilities of married life to current more learner-centred and facilitative programs which, with some exceptions, are not designed to shape participants according to pre-set outcomes but to invite them to engage in two processes: firstly, to reflect on their relationship and their ideas about and readiness for the marriage they want to build together, and secondly, to gain introductory training in skills they will need to make this happen.

In the 1970s, in order to improve their practice and protect and promote their educational work, educators and co-ordinators of these programs formed professional associations, the Catholic Society for Marriage Education (CSME) and the Australian Association for Marriage Education (AAME). In 1991, in response to a joint proposal from these associations, the Attorney General's Department provided funds for the combined marriage education associations to research, evaluate and develop their practice. The national research project reported in this study was commissioned by these combined associations .

The national research project

The project reported in this book began as a general evaluative enquiry into PMEPs. The research team narrowed this general agenda into a preliminary national enquiry with two complementary objectives. The first was *to map the pre-marriage education (PME) field*: to identify, describe and analyse PMEPs throughout Australia - the programs, educators and couples. The second task was *to discover the couples' experiences of PME and the differences they thought the programs had made* to their relationship, their ideas of marriage and their intention to marry. The team then developed a research design which refined these objectives further, clarified the kind of information required and developed the appropriate strategies to obtain and process the information.

The project did not intend to provide an exhaustive evaluation of the various processes used in PMEPs which remains for future research. Nor did it attempt to discover whether the marriages of couples who attend PMEPs have a longer and less troubled life than those who do not, although some information gained from this project would tend to support this notion. For example, the improved communication and conflict resolution skills many couples mention as an benefit gained for their marriage from participation in a PMEP can be seen as improving their longterm marital prospects; on the other hand, the delaying or cancelling of a small number of planned marriages due to uncertainties taken seriously in the times allocated for reflection in the PMEPs can also be seen as a preventative benefit.

The research work began in July 1991. The questions to be explored were clarified, the limits to the enquiry were set and the basic design of the enquiry established. As an initial study the enquiry had little to build on.

Early work provided the definition, a basic history of PMEPs and an analysis of its key characteristics. Having established clear goals and limits, there was then the challenge of designing the appropriate research methodology to explore these quantitative and qualitative questions Australia-wide in a relatively brief time. The survey methods chosen meant developing, trialling and administering a series of questionnnaires, firstly to identify and categorise PMEP programs throughout Australia and then to engage with couples who had attended PMEPs. This was to be enriched by interviews with couples in three capital cities.

During the early days of the project, the research team, mindful of the rights of interested parties in the research and related ethical issues, discussed the aims and methodology of the project with all stakeholders. This included the proposed ways of gaining information, provisions to safeguard the confidentiality of participants and to protect the freedom of individual educators and participants attending courses to participate or not. The uses to which the information would be put and ownership of the information and the resultant publication were also clarified.

The project then had to move from design to action. From September 1991 to June 1992, an initial questionnaire was sent to providers to map the field of PMEPs, three linked questionnaires were sent sequentially to nearly 1000 couples and over 150 educators responded to another questionnaire asking for feedback on PMEPs they had facilitated. Information from the questionnaires was processed as it arrived and a picture of the experience of PMEPs from the couples' perspective, complemented by information from the educators began to emerge. During this time a small number of interviews were carried out in Adelaide, Sydney and Canberra to supplement the information from the questionnaires.

The research information presents a fairly detailed national picture of nearly 1000 couples planning a church marriage in 1992. Most of these couples who responded on the whole felt enriched by the PMEPs and were interested in seeing the process developed further. The educators who answered a complementary questionnaire displayed strong interest and commitment to their work and raised questions concerning aspects of the program which require further research. The interest and commitment of many of the participants points to possible future collaboration.

Structure of the book

The book begins with an introduction to contemporary marriage and marriage education in its first three chapters and outlines the origins and development of the present form of PMEPs. The fourth chapter explores the research design of the project. It outlines the methods chosen for the project and examines the limits and strengths of the processes used to gain and assess the information needed for the study. The research findings take up the next five chapters. The fifth chapter describes PMEPs in Australia today using information from the questionnaires which mapped the field of pre-marriage education. It shows the range of providers and the topics and processes of their various programs throughout Australia. The participant couples are described in the sixth chapter and the seventh describes and provides some analysis of the educators who conduct PMEPs. The eighth chapter explores how the couples experienced the PMEP they attended. The ninth chapter looks at information provided by the couples on three possible changes they may have experienced as a result of attending the program: changes in the quality of their relationship, in their ideas about marriage and the way the roles of husband and wife are played

out and finally, in the depth of their resolve to marry. The tenth and final chapter is concerned with conclusions and challenges for future action.

What is clear from this study is that most of the couples who attended a PMEP (including those who were originally somewhat reluctant) feel enriched by the experience. They value the introductory training they receive in communication and conflict resolution and welcome the brief forced cessation of their busy lives when they themselves and their future happiness are the centre of facilitated reflection. In addition, as will be shown throughout this book, for many couples their participation in a PMEP contributed to a kind of coming of age which opened them up to further personal development and maturity beginning with the married life they intended to create.

Since the book is designed for a broad range of readers, some of the more technical material has been placed in the appendices for those seeking further detail. The text itself is designed for a good read by educators, program coordinators and interested couples hoping it will be the beginning of further collaborative work.

Chapter 2

Teaching about marriage

Images of marriage

Many couples approach their wedding day with images of marriage centred on a day filled with flowers, gold rings, white dresses and tulle, and a future which stretches endlessly through a haze of togetherness, happiness and love. Such romantic views are often built on the experience of a reasonably happy family life. For other couples, marriage does not conjure up such a rosy picture. Experiences of a family life punctuated by conflict, violence and breakdown can generate a far less idealistic view and may even dissuade individuals from attempting to create a marriage of their own.

These descriptions represent the two ends of a continuum of views on marriage. A number of couples would express a more moderate view of what marriage means to them but few would see marriage as something requiring specific skills and knowledge which can be learned. The idea of learning about marriage does not fit well with most people's images. Marriage tends to be seen as a 'natural' thing to do; something that 'happens' to people rather like 'falling in love'. Many people tend to believe that the challenges of married life will be overcome by the strength of their love. They believe that love will conquer all; that there is no need to approach married life as a vocation requiring skills and knowledge that need to be learnt and re-learnt throughout life.

The changing social context of marriage.

There is widespread evidence that people's ideas and practices of marriage have changed considerably. The most obvious change is that there has been a significant rise in the ages of males and females when they first marry. Over the past decade, far less men and women aged 20 - 24 marry. The number of men marrying under 25 has declined by 40%, and women by 34% (Kolar 1991: 25).

This however does not mean that marriage is decreasing in popularity. The Australian Institute of Family Studies' *Becoming Adult* study found that marriage still remains something that a majority of young people expect to experience (Millward 1991:28). Further, in another Institute study (Vandenheuvel 1991:8), respondents indicated alternative lifestyles, while tolerated, were not seen as a viable alternative to marriage. Only 15% of respondents indicated that they thought that living together or alone was the ideal living arrangement.

What these studies reveal is that the people who do marry today are noticeably different from their earlier counterparts and that there are many more pathways to marriage than in earlier times. It is not unreasonable to infer that the marriages these people construct could well differ considerably from the marriages of couples some 20 - 30 years ago.

Because couples are older when they first marry, they have had the opportunity to have a wide variety of life experiences - completing studies, leaving home, finding and losing employment and perhaps a series of intimate relationships which may have resulted in a period of co-habitation. Some may have also experienced the breakdown of their original family and its associated upheavals and traumas - this resulting in a more cautious approach to the idea of marriage as being a lifelong commitment.

There have also been some significant changes in society which have altered the way people in general view marriage. The Family Law Act of 1973 removed the stigma previously attached to divorce, and along with accompanying changes to social welfare provision, has enabled women to leave marriages without the threat of being destitute. Divorce has become an acceptable answer to an unsatisfactory marriage. Changes to laws governing the rights of co-habiting couples have made this lifestyle a much more common option for couples.

The women's movement has contributed to a re-ordering of gender roles in our society. Sex roles are less rigid, and equal opportunity legislation and rules governing equal parental responsibility for children, combined with greater education and employment opportunities over the past two decades, has led many women to redefine their roles.

Relationships based on mutual sharing and equal participation by both partners in all facets of married life are now seen by many as desirable. This change has also caused some men to confront willingly or unwillingly a new definition of their roles (Edgar 1991). The traditional model of marriage with the man as 'the breadwinner' is no longer seen as the only valid form of marriage. This new move towards relationships founded on equality of individuals has sometimes been resisted by men fearing that they would be disempowered.

The economic context in which marriages now take place is also vastly different from some thirty years ago. Two incomes are now almost a necessity in order to meet all the financial demands placed on a family. The family itself is sometimes valued not only for what it can produce, but for what goods it can amass and/or consume. The necessity of sharing the breadwinner role can add extra strain and conflict to a marriage relationship as people attempt to juggle their multiple roles of husband / father, wife / mother and workers.

The shape of the family, too, has altered. Children are no longer automatically linked with marriage and there is an increasing number of couples who are electing to remain childless or to restrict their family to one or two children (McDonald 1990:17). The advent of reliable and safe methods of contraception has had a large influence on this trend.

Contraception has also had an impact on sexual behavior. Sexual activity is no longer confined to the marriage relationship. Earlier sexual experiences and the changing values attached to sexual relationships have meant that marriage no longer represents the only pathway for adult sexual initiation (Edgar 1991). Modern marriage is no longer viewed as being necessary in order to satisfy people's needs for legitimate sexual relationships. It has increasingly been viewed as *a state which provides promises of emotional satisfaction, companionship and the lifetime commitment of one person to another based on love* (Millward 1991: 28).

The stability and permanence of marriage has also changed. People have made many changes to the way they view, enter, live out and of course leave their married lives. One marriage in four breaks down often with high emotional and financial costs. Wolcott (1988:18) observes that questions about the preparedness of people, especially young people, for marriage are increasingly being asked. She further states the belief that education for relationships and family life would go some of the way in providing benefits to those who desire healthy marriages and families.

What is marriage education?

Informal versions of marriage education start in the cradle. Families are the primary providers of the first experiences of relationships (Pirola and Pirola 1984:2). Children are exposed to messages about the roles of mother and wife, husband and father and their associated rights, duties and obligations from their earliest days. They observe how their parents talk to each other, how they handle differences and show affection. As children grow they take on the culture of their family and its associated behaviours, and these become the basis on which they relate to the outside world.

Schools provide a forum where children and adolescents gain further knowledge and insights into family life and relationships through various subject areas, but also in more covert ways through the way relationships

between men and women are presented in books, and in the day to day life of the school in general. The mass media is also a marriage educator. Magazines, books and the electronic media provide many positive and negative images of the family and marriage.

While these life experiences provide informal opportunities to learn about marriage, marriage education tends to refer to more formal approaches to facilitating learning provided by a range of differently targetted marriage education programs. These can be provided for people entering relationships, preparing for marriage, wishing to enrich their relationship, coping with major changes in their marriage, or contemplating re-marriage. Such designated programs have developed in different ways depending on the educational approach of the various programs and the context in which they are offered.

Marriage education programs

A range of definitions provided in the literature on marriage education highlight different aspects of this type of provision. Burnard (1986) emphasises the role of marriage education in raising awareness of goals, expectations and attitudes, offering training in skills and assisting in the recognition of when a relationship should be discontinued. Emphasis on preventing family disharmony and enhancing family harmony through role and skill training as couples move into, live in or move out of a family unit, is emphasised in the definition of marriage education provided by the Federal Attorney General's Department. AAME in its more operational definition highlights the use of adult learning principles and couple interaction in the educative process and the need for enrichment and evaluation of relationships over the entire life cycle (Wolcott 1988:18).

The emphasis in all definitions on the use of the word 'couple' is noteworthy, suggesting that marriage education has as its main focus couples rather than individual learners.

Marriage education programs are now offered at various stages in the life cycle of people's relationships. There are currently forms of marriage education for those preparing for marriage, those already married and those contemplating re-marriage. This is represented in the following figure.

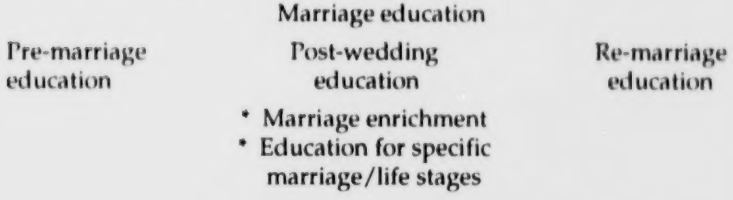

Figure 1 Types of Marriage Education

Pre-marriage education is directed at those couples who have, or are in the process of making a decision to marry. *Post-wedding education* encompasses a wide variety of programs often dealing with specific tasks over the life cycle of the marriage. They can also be of a more broadly based enrichment type such as Marriage Encounter or concerned with particular challenges in the life cycle of a marriage: the arrival of children, coping with illness or bereavement, the empty nest and so on. *Re-marriage education* deals with the specific tasks associated with the transition to a second or subsequent marriage.

These various forms of marriage education have their own objectives and style and have developed differently to meet their various goals. The focus of this study is on pre-marriage education, not on post-wedding or re-marriage education. The next section, therefore, examines the aims and development of pre-marriage education.

Pre-marriage education

Pre-marriage education (sometimes and now less often referred to as pre-marriage counselling) has considerable variety. Sometimes the focus is on groups of couples, and at other times on individual couples.

In America, the term 'pre-marital counselling' was used to describe the medical examination and the associated discussions on issues relating to sexuality and contraception that individuals would attend prior to marriage (Mudd 1957; Meschan 1964). The term was also used to describe programs of therapeutic intervention for distressed pre-marital couples, as well as educative programs which were attended by individuals or groups of couples. These programs dealt with issues such as sexual adjustment, marital roles, relationships with in-laws, wedding plans and religious concerns (Guldner 1971; Schumm and Denton 1979). This latter type of program has similarities with the Australian provision of pre-marriage education and is referred to by a variety of terms including pre-Cana, marriage preparation, marriage guidance and, more recently, pre-marriage education (PME).

Aims of pre-marriage education

There has been considerable diversity of thought about the aims and purposes of pre-marriage education. Burnard, speaking at a national workshop in 1978, identified three tasks that pre-marriage education could assist couples with:

- coming to an understanding of the kind of relationship that each person wants;
- seeking an answer to the question, 'Are we ready and do we want the same kind of relationship?'; and
- leading couples to the point of making a decision based on the concepts of love and commitment.

Other writers have stressed *skilling* as a key to pre-marriage education. Enhancing skills using processes aimed at enriching the couples' relationships to build skills as well as their commitment is highlighted by Mace (1978), Schumm and Denton (1979) and Senediak (1990).

The developmental dimension of PME was stressed by Olsen (1983) who stated that the purpose of pre-marriage education was to create in couples an awareness that marriage is a process that is continually requiring to be built up and worked on. Issues such as clarifying expectations, re-evaluating the decision to marry and becoming more aware of the relationship so as to be able to work on difficulties as soon as they arise are also important. Making couples aware of the strengths and weaknesses that exist in their relationship, through an understanding of the relationship dynamic, and assisting couples to recognise the resources they have to deal with this, is the central purpose of a pre-marital assessment program developed by Buckner and Salts (1985).

A forward-looking and preventative approach was highlighted by Bagarozzi and Rauen (1981:13) when they wrote that the aims of PME should include:

> *... helping prospective mates focus on, and begin to deal with some of the critical tasks and issues they will face in marriage, to help them to acquire behavioural skills and problem solving strategies that will enable them to overcome these developmental crises when they arise.*

Present day pre-marriage education usually takes groups of couples through a range of reflective exercises and information giving sessions aimed at increasing awareness, building skills, clarifying expectations and re-evaluating their decision to marry. Emphasis on the developmental phases of marriage and associated life crises may also be included with a strong preventative agenda.

Pre-marriage education has now become a widely available service for couples preparing for marriage but it was not always the case. The following section traces its development in Australia over the last fifty years.

Development of pre-marriage education in Australia

In Australia, although pre-marriage education programs have been attended by couples almost exclusively as a preliminary to a church wedding, the development of PME programming has not been an exclusively church affair. Besides the interest of the Attorney General's Department, there have also been a number of non church-related marriage education providers whose influence has been significant.

Beginnings

According to available information, early pre-marriage programs were conducted in Australia in the 1940s by the Young Christian Workers (YCW), a Catholic youth organisation concerned with social development. For Burnard (1978), the catalyst for this move was to be found in the changing nature of the society at the time. The war had shattered family ties, making it difficult for mothers and fathers to pass on the knowledge and skills required to be a good husband or wife to their children. An example of programs of this type is the pre-Cana conferences held in Victoria. In 1958 these were sponsored by the YCW and the National Catholic Girls' Movement and took place in a number of convents around Melbourne, as well as at the Victorian Employers' Federation Building. There were nine subject areas, which were taught in a series of lectures, spread over a period of approximately 18 hours - two full Sundays and two Friday evenings. Lectures were given on the following topics:

- Christian marriage in a pagan world
- Masculine and feminine psychology
- Courtship and engagement
- The marriage ceremony
- Parenthood
- Christ, the king of the home
- Discussion on homemaking
- Masculine and feminine physiology
- The morals of marriage

Upwards of 50 - 60 couples would attend each conference. Men and women participants were segregated for the sessions dealing with courtship and engagement, masculine and feminine physiology and the morals of marriage. In the course, lectures were given by a panel of priests, bankers, doctors and married couples. The occasional specialist in a subject area was invited. In one course, for example, an interior decorator spoke to a group about turning a house into a home.

These church sponsored, pre-Cana conferences as they were called, promoted Christian values as a solution to the increasing incidence of marital breakdown. As Burnard (1978) again points out, the courses were characterised by authority and enthusiasm. Courses of this kind were eventually offered in every capital city in Australia, as well as in many provincial centres.

At about the same time, state sponsored marriage guidance and counselling services were expanding. With government recognition and accompanying financial assistance, organisations began using professionally trained staff to offer counselling and tutoring for couples contemplating marriage.

The 50s and 60s also witnessed the development of the Marriage Encounter movement. Originally sponsored by the Catholic church in Spain, it then

spread rapidly to the Americas and thence to many other countries including Australia. Although initially concerned with providing enrichment opportunities for married couples, the movement generated a series of distinctive pre-marriage education programs such as Engaged Encounter and Evenings for the Engaged which spread throughout Australia.

The 1960s and 1970s

By the middle 1960s pre-marriage education was widely promoted through the churches. In addition, a number of independent marriage guidance organisations like Marriage Guidance Councils and the Family Life Movement were expanding their pre-marriage education provision.

The early 70s also saw the first attempts to organise and draw together the providers of pre-marriage education around Australia. In 1973 a seminar, hosted by the Melbourne Conference for Engaged Couples was held as part of the 40th International Eucharistic Congress. Out of this initial gathering was formed the National Society of Pre-Marital Education Organisations, the forerunner of the Catholic Society for Marriage Education (CSME). In 1979, an equivalent organisation for practitioners and providers not necessarily affiliated with the Catholic church was formed - the Australian Association for Marriage Education (AAME).

These two national bodies became the focus for activities associated with gaining funding from the government to support the development of pre-marriage education, and as providers of many of the early training opportunities for workers in the field.

These times were also times of crisis for the programs. The lecture format was proving unpopular with couples who had experienced more participative schooling which emphasised discussion and personal involvement in learning activities. There was also difficulty in securing the required number of volunteer facilitators / teachers and maintaining the quality of the programs.

The Second Vatican Council was beginning to have a major impact on Catholic pre-marriage education. In Adelaide and Melbourne in particular, groups of marriage educators adopted the Council's holistic notions of the Christian vocation, emphasising the dignity of the laity and their special role in the church's broader tasks of humanising men and women and serving the wider community. There was a distinct move away from an information giving, authoritarian style of teaching to a model encouraging couples to look at their relationship and seek out the questions they needed to answer before their marriage. Educators introduced processes such as the use of written exercises which the couple would complete separately and then share, reduced the numbers of course participants and encouraged greater interaction. These were introduced and later adopted as normal course processes and were often taken up by other practitioners. The following description of a pre-marriage

education course conducted by the Marriage Guidance Council of South Australia in 1971 illustrates the beginings of this shift:

> *The emphasis is on group work...the groups may meet for instruction but separate off into couples or just individuals to carry out a task. There is a little information giving in order to satisfy anticipated needs, but no real lecturing at any stage.*

By and large, during this period, pre-marriage education programs presented marriage as fulfilling and challenging but not problematic. The traditional duties attached to husband and wife roles were assumed and expected to be the norm. There was no encouragement for couples to work at the type of marriage they wanted or to develop the skills needed to build the marriage of their choice.

1976 was a landmark year for the development of pre-marriage education in Australia. In that year, the Federal Attorney General Hon. J. Ellicott became the first politician to lend practical support to the value of funding pre-marriage education as a preventative approach to the increasing levels of marital breakdown. This funding made it possible to employ trained, professional staff and heralded the advent of the Australian government as a new and active influence on the programs.

In 1977 a team of researchers in the United States of America developed the *PREPARE* (PREmarital Personal And Relationship Evaluation) inventory, which was to have a significant impact on the way marriage celebrants and some counsellors approached the task preparing couples for marriage. It was developed as a tool to assist clergy and counsellors in making objective and systematic assessments of personal and relationship issues for couples. PREPARE was based on a number of previously developed instruments (Olsen *et al.* 1983:4). It contained eleven categories covering areas including realistic expectations, financial managment, family and friends, personality issues, leisure activities, equalitarian roles, communication, sexual relationship, religious orientation, children and marriage and conflict resolution. The inventory also included a scale to assess couples' level of idealism about their relationship. It is now widely used in Australia by a number of clergy and people involved in the preparation of couple for marriage across virtually all denominations.

Adult education theory and practice, largely informed by the influential work of Malcolm Knowles (1970), Alan Tough (1971), Carl Rogers (1969) and other adult education theorists, was introduced to educators at several successive national marriage education conferences in the late 70s. Because the field of pre-marriage education was still relatively small, the conferences could bring together most of the providers. New ideas were discussed and promoted. Experiential teaching strategies were introduced and trialled. The couple and their relationship became the primary focus.

The response of pre-marriage education providers however was not uniform or regulated. While some hesitated, many began to adopt the more facilitative role and encouraged couples to focus on those areas of their relationship which they believed to be important.

From the late 1970s, a number of providers began to evaluate their programs. In 1978, King and Groundwater-Smith from Sydney University were commissioned to carry out an in-depth evaluation of the program at the Family Life Movement in Sydney. In 1981, Devitt researched dropout rates in PMEPs sponsored by Centacare in Brisbane. Campbell evaluated programs conducted by Centacare in Sydney in 1984, as did Forbes in 1990. Australian evaluative research was paralleled in America with work done by Schumm and Denton (1979), Bagarozzi and Rauen (1981), and Giblin, Sprenkle and Sheehan (1985). There were some detailed empirical evaluation studies of the effects of marriage preparation programs (e.g. Farris and Avery 1980; Ridley *et al.* 1981; D'Augelli *et al.* 1974; Bader *et al.* 1980; Nunnally *et al.* 1975) as well as some more qualitative research which explored participants' descriptions of their own experiences (Nickols *et al.* 1986; Buckner and Salts 1985).

The 1980s

In the 1980s these changes were consolidated. There was a gradual lifting of the at least implicit compulsion for couples to participate in pre-marriage education programs. Marriage education in general was beginning to develop as a field of practice in its own right, rather than as an adjunct to the counselling profession. Co-ordinators for the programs were employed and many educators also received a small honorarium. The concept of offering couples the choice of topics to be covered during the programs was introduced by some agencies and groups as a means of making the programs more relevant.

In 1984-85 the FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study) inventory was developed in America by a team of people headed by Sister Barbara Markey. FOCCUS was created to deal with the current issues and needs identified in the preparation of couples for marriage. It was designed to help couples identify their issues and concerns, as well as raising those questions they believe need to be discussed prior to marriage. FOCCUS was introduced to Australia in the mid-1980s and there are now approximately 500 people accredited to use it. A number of these are educators who use it as part of their locally based activities in preparing couples for marriage.

The 1980s also saw a significant change in what was taught in pre-marriage courses. Besides assisting couples to reflect on themselves and the marriage they were soon to enter, courses began to include training in marital communication and conflict resolution which had been developed in the human relations training movement initiated by Kurt Lewin (1947).

Types of Providers

Pre-marriage education in Australia today occurs sometimes in small and isolated locations and at other times in larger, more centralised systems which makes the task of attempting to draw a comprehensive picture of all providers in Australia extremely difficult.

There are two main groups of providers of pre-marriage education: non-church based and church based.

Non-church based providers

A number of non-church based human service agencies offer individual pre-marriage counselling for individuals and couples and relationship education for people interested in understanding and improving their relationships. Marriage guidance professionals offer pre-marriage counselling for couples seeking such a service. Some may integrate inventories such as PREPARE or FOCCUS into their sessions. In addition, there are a number of human relations education and counselling centres like COPE in Adelaide, the School of Marriage in Sydney or White Cross in Bundaberg which offer education and training in human relations skills for couples in relationships as well as other interested people. These are sometimes used by couples contemplating marriage. There are also other human development programs using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and other growth programs which couples may attend as part of their preparation for mariage.

Although these non-church based providers have developed their programs in response to the projected needs of their clients, they have not attracted as many couples as church based programs. A notable exception is the Family Relations Institute in Victoria which is the largest non-church based provider of PME in Australia.

Church based providers

Local providers

Marriage celebrants have traditionally been the main providers of earlier forms of pre-marriage education. Some celebrants have a series of talks with couples; others participate in pre-marriage education courses as educators or guest presenters. A large number of celebrants use the PREPARE or FOCCUS inventory with individual couples. Some also encourage couples to participate in *locally based programs*. The changing nature of parish populations and the number of couples seeking marriage at different times make this provision of PME sporadic and difficult to identify. Parish programs predominantly cater for couples planning to marry in a given locality. These pre-marriage education programs tend to be of two types: specific programs offered by a single parish specifically for those couples marrying within that parish (for

example, Holy Trinity Church in Adelaide and the Good Shepherd Parish in Mt. Isa); alternatively, programs coordinated from a central diocesan office but located within parishes (an example here is the Ballarat Diocesan Family Service).

Centralised providers

The Catholic, Anglican and, to a lesser extent, Uniting churches provide pre-marriage education as a small part of their centralised welfare services. The practical reasons for locating pre-marriage education within these centralised services should not be overlooked. The Anglican, Catholic and Uniting churches in 1991 collectively performed 44% (50,064) of all weddings that took place in Australia and 75% of all weddings performed by ministers of religion of recognised denominations (ABS 1992:13). Since couples wishing to be married in these churches are strongly recommended to attend a pre-marriage education program, their large numbers have been an incentive for these churches to adopt a more centralised and co-ordinated approach to PME provision.

Thus, in the space of some 20 years, PME has become an educational practice in its own right responding to increasing community, church and government concern for couples and for the marriages they enter and the families they create.

Having provided a brief historical introduction to this form of educational practice, there are a number of common characteristics that shape its practice and evaluation which are examined in the next chapter as background to the research study.

Chapter 3

Dimensions of pre-marriage education

Most forms of present day pre-marriage education programs share a number of common dimensions: they are a form of human relations education, a church sponsored education activity and a type of life transition education. The way PMEPs verify these characteristics highlights some of their unique and challenging dimensions.

Pre-marriage education as a form of human relations education

Pre-marriage education as a learning program provided by a range of government and non-government providers can be located within the broader category of human relations education. In practice it is offered under the same general field of practice as relationship training and marriage guidance and enrichment, both of which have had considerable influence on the programs that have developed.

Human relations education which is now offered in many schools introduces children and adolescents to ways of understanding and managing the conventions of relationships and sexuality. A wide range of curricula attempt to integrate liberal and equitable principles into the processes and attitudes of human relations such as self esteem, interpersonal respect, effective communication, and conflict resolution and to link these with careful and accurate information concerning the physical and psychological processes of human development, human reproduction and sexuality. The school based curriculum tends to be open ended and largely future oriented.

Other forms of human relations education offered to adults often tend to be grounded in the actual experiences of a relationship and geared to healing and building what has been established. Many tend to offer a process by which participant learners assess what they have created, attempt to heal hurts that may have been caused or felt and look to where they wish to be. In this kind of training, the emphasis tends to be on what the couple wants to create in a

relationship which has already begun, is taking shape and whose character and quality will largely depend on what they want it to be. In practice, human relations education may recruit couples contemplating marriage and, while not directly focused on preparation for marriage, can have the effect of assisting couples come to grips with some of marriage's more down to earth dimensions.

PMEPs particularly in the last decade have increasingly included training in human relations skills like interpersonal communication, stress management, decision making and conflict resolution. This training is shaped by the pre-marital context in which it is offered. As will become apparent in later chapters, contemporary couples place great value on the human relations education component of the PMEPs they attend.

Pre-marriage education as a church based activity

The almost exclusive church sponsorship of pre-marriage education was noted by Burnard (1986:1) who wrote:

> *One common attitude amongst professional academics and secular circles is that pre-marriage education is a 'child of the churches' and is concerned with imposing an acceptable model of marriage instead of helping people define the type of marriage and family models that will work for them and providing them with the opportunities to develop the skills necessary to achieve these goals.*

The continued interest in and sponsorship of pre-marriage education by some churches significantly colours some of the programs offered in different ways. Some sponsoring churches promote the religious interests of their church in addition to attempting to meet the needs of participant couples. In a similar way a church related but independent welfare agency which runs pre-marriage education programs on behalf of these churches openly includes in its agenda the promotion of its welfare and counselling services. It is significant in this study to differentiate between the interests of sponsoring churches.

The churches present three typical approaches which have been named by Johnson (1966) as the 'professional', 'priestly' and 'prophetic'. Waddel (1978:31) in an unpublished paper drew out the implications for ministry:

> *'Professional' type clergy stress formal clerical and extra-clerical training. In their ministerial work, they emphasise counselling... their theology and liturgy are liberal and flexible. The 'priestly' type clergy stress conformity to rituals and beliefs, thus in their ministerial work they emphasise supervision of ritual duties of parishioners. Their theology and liturgy are orthodox. The 'prophetic' type clergy stress personal qualities and a*

> *'calling' to the ministry. In their ministerial work they emphasise conversion of the 'unsaved' and supervision of members with respect to taboos. Their theology is fundamentalist... the prophetic type clergy have no set order of liturgy.*

Pre-marriage education as practised by various churches continues to reflect this threefold approach to ministry. This can be seen in the way the parts in the programs concerned with communication, sexuality and the family (the so-called human relations parts) are linked to the more specifically 'religious' parts. Thus in one evangelical church (which would correspond to the prophetic type), three of the six sessions were devoted to a course of Christian instruction culminating at the end of the session on the third day with a challenge to the participant couples to declare their commitment to Christ as couples about to become new families in the Christian parish community. In another church sponsored program (the church here would correspond to the professional type), the minister who was a trained psychologist was anxious to introduce the couple to the counselling services of the church 'if ever they should need them' and minimised his references to the religious dimensions of the marriage suggesting that he would explore those matters in a different setting. In yet a third (representing the priestly type) the minister presided over the sessions which were run by lay couples, intervened a couple of times to correct a point and then gave a strong sermon at the end of the last session on the meaning of the sacrament of marriage, its obligations and blessings.

Although Burnard (1986), whose approach would approximate a professional approach, found the authoritarian approach of some church programs offensive to his stance, fervent members of that church may well have found it appropriate and rejected the more liberal human relations centred approach as neglecting the mystery and mysticism of Christian marriage. His concern does, however, raise a significant point about the relationship between the 'religious' church and the 'helping' church, particularly since there are in most churches two overlapping active programs corresponding to these titles. Most churches have a strong welfare agenda which more or less overlays their more 'religious' activities.

From the 'helping' perspective, the churches' concern to make sure that their members about to marry know what they are doing and have made a mature choice, is behind sessions in PMEPs where the individuals in the couples are encouraged to reflect deeply on themselves and their readiness for marriage.

But the helping church can also be a 'confronting' and 'ruling' church to its members and a proselytiser to non-members. Although present in noticeably different degrees, these agendas can also be verified to some extent in many church-sponsored programs. The confrontation varies considerably. In churches concerned with a helping agenda, it is often about the quality of the participants' commitment to each other and to their marriage rather than about the presence or absence of faith. When, however, church sponsored pre-

mariage education programs include strong religious teaching and challenge to religious commitment, participant learners are offered less choice and the program is less centred on them as individuals than as members of the church. This profoundly modifies the PMEPs in such contexts by limiting the areas to be discussed or made problematic.

Within the information sharing part of the program which is given different amounts of air space in different programs, are a series of anomalies. Most churches' 'religious' agenda requires clear presentation of their view of what marriage should be. Various churches can have strong prescriptive views of pre-marital sex, birth control, abortion, the nature of sexuality, the roles of men and women in marriage and the place of children in the family. At the same time the church's 'helping' agenda requires that couples be acquainted with the reality of marriage as it is actually commonly practised. This information is not so much the rules but the reality as gained from the accumulated experiences of the church in dealing with its members' struggles and difficulties in making their marriages work. The 'helping' church wants to promote and support healthy, satisfying, realistic, contemporary marriages which in fact may depart from some traditionally held church views.

Edgar (1988) listed characteristics of the 'new marriage' which indicate that what is being created and called 'marriage' by Australian couples is different from many churches' models. The 'helping' church may in fact develop a radically different approach to marriage from the 'religious' church since, in its helping agenda, it encourages couples to develop ways to make marriage work within contemporary expectations even if in doing this they ignore or at least place less emphasis on parts of the churches' religious requirements.

When marriage education is embedded within the welfare services of a church rather than other parts of its services, as for example it is in most Catholic dioceses, its agenda has tended to be shaped by concerns it has in common with this side of church activity. Concern for the real-life situation of couples and families, input from religious people who are also professional psychologists, welfare workers and educators and the extensive use of lay workers and volunteers have had a strong influence in the development of current pre-marriage education programs. Their non-intrusive style, couple-centred focus, emphasis on skilling and on helping couples get in touch with their own needs and dreams, reflect current development in the helping rather than ritual interests of the churches. In some places this has generated interest in germane forms of theology particularly the theology of 'reception' which highlights and validates lay people's experience and wisdom. Apart from being a church sponsored activity, PME is also a particular kind of educational activity which can be called life transition education.

Pre-marriage education as a type of life transition education

Life transition refers to the way people experience changes in their lives as a passage from one state or set of circumstances to another. Life transitions include changes of career, job loss, migrations, illnesses and bereavements, changes in social relationships and the like. The learning process associated with the process of transition can be called life transition learning and educational programs aimed to facilitate this learning can be called life transition education (LTE). LTE differs from commonly encountered forms of education such as providing information on a topic or training in a new skill in that *the development of the learners themselves* is the focus rather than things to be learned. LTE is practised in career education, bereavement education, forms of religious education, consciousness raising, anti-racism and the like. Some of the activity of LTE educators is often at least partially uninvited. This interventionist character of LTE creates a challenge for respectful and concerned educators who do not wish to intrude unnecessarily while at the same time wishing to offer learning opportunities to a person or couple who is perceived to be in need without perhaps consciously realising it.

As an exercise in which learners are encouraged to embrace to meet their personal needs, LTE more than didactic or skilling education must engage the learner in a personalised, reflective process in which his or her autonomy as a learner and human agent needs to be safeguarded and celebrated. A learner who feels forced into learning related to his or her transition choice will either resist or accede to some learning against his or her will thus corrupting the enterprise from education to persuasion or co-ercion. Life transition educators seeking to promote a particular perspective need to review the processes in their programs to ensure that they respect and confirm the autonomy of learners while offering reasons and outlining benefits attached to the direction of a proposed life transition which they, the educators, may favour.

There is tension between the interests of the providers in promoting a specific outcome and the limits and capacity of the educational format to carry such an agenda without degenerating into special pleading, propaganda or forms of proselytism. This raises the question of how educators who seek to 'help' others can develop respectful educational practice. An additional difficulty in practice is that, since many LTE programs tend to follow a set format, facilitators may find it difficult to respond readily to the individual needs of participants outside the pre-set time frame. Many LTE programs tend to be initiatory and open ended rather than shaped educative experiences, with the accompanying difficulties of lack of control of the direction of the learning experience and of reliable ways to interpret and evaluate its outcomes.

Processes of life transition education

There appear to be four major processes which are usually present in one form or another in life transition education programs and which often continue at the same time enriching or inhibiting each other. These are preparation, facilitation, follow up and review.

Preparation

Practitioners of life transition education need to prepare for their work, particularly since it involves to a greater or lesser extent intervening in people's private lives. They need to orient themselves: to get their motives clear before intervening; to clarify motives so that they will be able to withstand the temptation to bully or coerce when they should persuade and dialogue. Since they may also be rejected when they attempt to engage reluctant learners, they may also need a clear vision of who they are and what they are endeavouring to achieve.

Facilitation

There are eight major teaching/learning exchanges which occur to a greater or lesser extent in LTE programs. These are engagement and orientation, introspection, forecasting and interpreting, skilling, challenging for choice, letting go the past, healing and re-building and finally grounding the decision in action.

Since much LTE aims at creating a learning orientation among people who have not always contracted to be part of that action, an initial part of LTE facilitation involves *engagement and orientation of the learners.* This involves two processes: the educator needs to be introduced to and given some crediblity with the potential learners. The second related process is 'mobilising to learn' by which potential learners are invited, persuaded and cajoled into a learning / questioning reflecting stance. This mobilising agenda requires the facilitator to develop a range of respectful interventionist skills.

The second major process can be called *generating introspection.* The learners are invited to turn back back on themselves in a direct way. This stage is designed to heighten self awareness so that the processes of the program are taken to heart in terms of what they mean to the learner. Techniques to achieve this include explorations of self concept, self esteem, future aspirations and dreams. The third process is *forecasting and interpreting:* providing information about the character of the transition and the nature of the future chosen life. The fourth process is *skills training:* identifying and providing basic introductions to the skills required to manage the various processes which need to be carried out subsequent to the life transition choice being contemplated.

Challenging for choice is the fifth process. This has two components. The first is exploring the reasons underpinning the life transition decisions about to be made and promoting their adoption. This leads to processes to precipitate choice and would correspond to the confronting interventions outlined by Heron (1989:79). It is one of the most difficult of the stages where the helping educator has to use what powers of discernment he or she can muster. This part of the life transition educational process is aimed at more than persuasion. The educator has to reach out to support the learner / participant entering a life transition knowing that such transitions generate choices which have to be made.

Letting go the past is the sixth process. The learner is firstly encouraged to move on from his or her past. The phrase 'begin by saying good-bye' carries the meaning well. In life transition education this component needs to be directly attended to to facilitate the desired new orientation. Closing the past can open or reveal wounds which need to be attended to and where possible *healed* or at least acknowledged. The final process is *grounding*. It is concerned to establish ways in which the choice can be put into practice at the chosen time and persevered with.

Follow up

Life transition education often continues long after the transition has been made and the learner has embarked on his or her new life. In this *post transition phase* the educator / mentor attempts to help the learner set out to build quality and stability into his or her life choice by working out areas requiring further learning and arranging appropriate learning and training experiences.

Review

As a purposive educational program life transition education has its own *review process*. The learning that takes place in this form of facilitated reflective learning is, in the first instance, assessed by the learners themselves. Has the bullet been bitten, the dragon slain, the door opened or shut. In addition, as a sponsored 'helping' course, life transition educational programs are often required to provide some form of evaluation to their sponsors. Evaluation for LTE needs to reflect its intensely learner centred character. It is not possible to carry out instrumental pre-course / post-course testing. Evaluation in the first instance has to look at the level of satisfaction of the learners and attempt to identify the usefulness of the various processes used in the programs largely using the testimony of the participants and to a lesser extent their learning facilitators.

Reflection on the dimensions of life transition education leads now to a consideration of how it is verified in pre-marriage education.

Life transition dimensions of pre-marriage education

Many of the particular educational characteristics of PME are revealed in the way it verifies the major life transition education agendas: preparation, engagement and orientation, introspection, forecasting and interpreting, skilling, challenging for choice, letting go the past, healing and re-building and finally grounding the decision in action.

Most trained facilitators have spent time in reflective preparation. Sponsoring organisations offering training programs often include time for reflective preparation so that the educators become committed and sensitised to their task. Many PME programs take great care over the initial engagement with participant couples in order to generate a positive learning stance, since participant couples can have a wide range of initial feelings ranging from excited enthusiasm to reluctance and ambiguity about attending the program.

Pre-marriage education is also concerned to provide couples with processes to facilitate a process of introspection - of facing the facts of their personal character and attitudes and those of their partner. This delicate process is derived from the counselling function of PME. Partners are encouraged in a supportive atmosphere to face the reality of their coupledom and to adopt a more realistic view of their relationship. This amounts to reflecting on the constituent elements of their relationship - their families, their culture and their own interests, fears, likes and dislikes. There is also the history of their own relationship. Is it of long standing? Is it a culmination of some time of co-habitation? Alternatively, is the marriage to be one of the first major adult acts involving permanently leaving home and establishing a new family with its own separate identity - with all the responsibilities that this entails? Such a process involves letting go of forms of false consciousness. Educative processes with this agenda can cause one or other partner to confront parts of their personality or behaviour which they have not 'owned'. In the context of pre-marriage education, such painful processes may be precipitated by actions, comments or honest feedback 'requested' by the partner.

Forecasting and intepreting in PMEPs involves another delicate task of distinguishing between what the participant couples hope for and dream of and some of the expected characteristics of life beyond marriage, especially its permanence, legal identity and the kinds of role and status changes involved. Interpretation is linked to the forecasting process and again involves individuals and couples in quite wide ranging and searching reflection. The facilitator's task is often to assist as participants unpack their ideas of marriage, masculinity and femininity, sexuality, love, male and female roles in marriage, children, and submit them at least implicitly, to a double critique - whether their own ideas when brought into the open are satisfactory to the person him or herself and then how they mesh with those of their partner.

Many PME programs include introductory skills training in marital communication and conflict resolution within the short span of the course. This training in PME also conveys indirectly the grounded nature of married life in a telling way and dovetails well with direct presentations on the nature of married life which may not completely penetrate couple's pre-marital glow.

The significance of the phase of letting go, of accepting the losses and hurts of transition and becoming healed and re-integrated is often not highlighted in a couple's preparations for marriage. This is partly because many people preparing for marriage have strongly optimistic and future oriented attitudes. There may be a presumption that when couples do decide to marry, their choice is an indication of a largely unambiguous assertion that being married is a better option than the life they currently pursue. The fact that there may be losses involved tends to dawn on couples during some processes offered in many PMEPs. With younger couples, where one or other partner may physically depart from their family home and in so doing symbolically and really leave their childhood, such moments may carry considerable loss which partners may need to acknowledge. Older couples may have previous relationships, established habits and lifestyles which may be inappropriate to their married state and which need to be confronted and farewelled in the process of generating the related process of choice.

PME shares the choice orientation of life transition education. Its agenda is also to generate a solid, unequivocal and committed decision. People entering marriage still see it as a permanent longitudinal commitment although much of the surrounding culture stresses the contingency of human life and the difficulty even inadvisability of making life-time choices. PME programs have a clear path from choice to action. The act of marriage is a classic grounding action which carries the choice to marry into the personal and social world at a defined point in place and time. Thus PME can serve to link this witnessed public commitment to an equally definite and grounded inner assent and so generate a completed holistic life transition learning experience.

This consideration of the LTE dimensions of PME helps to highlight its complexity as an at least partly interventionist educational process issuing in choice. This dimension, together with its characteristic as a church sponsored activity and a form of human relations education, gives a clear idea of the nature of PME. These dimensions also provide a foundation for understanding some of the issues and questions which have arisen in this form of educational practice.

Issues and questions in pre-marriage education

There are a number of important issues in PME which are derived from its being a practice that combines the three dimensions of human relations training, church sponsored largely preventative action and life transition education.

One of these is the general *coping ideology* which tends to characterise more preventative approaches favored by some educators. The terms 'functioning marriage' or 'marriage satisfaction' have a conservative, prosaic ring to them. They would capture the imagination of very few people about to set out on the journey of their lives. In an educational program recruiting couples who in fact may not see the dangers ahead, a preventative agenda needs to be enriched by a challenging agenda where the marriage is not seen as a trap for the unwary but as an invitation to mutual enrichment and enoblement.

Another factor is the *time limit* of approximately 8 to 12 hours which has a powerful influence on what can be actually achieved. This has been worked from experience of 'how much the couples will take before being absent from sessions' rather than being an acceptable duration in the light of the learning needs required to be met.

A tension has also emerged between the churches' various agendas and the limits to which a doctrine driven church can sponsor what can sometimes amount to an exercise to develop adult self-determination. Many churches, while not denying the importance of generating adult autonomy among married couples, are more focused on generating an appropriate couple / family to take its place within the church according to the church's expectations. Some of the more liberating agendas of some of the churches could encompass an empowering and emancipatory approach but this is not currently reflected in pre-marriage education practice.

Pre-marriage education is also an interesting example of interventionist education where, at least to some extent, participants who were co-opted as reluctant learners become converted to active and interested participation. This appears to be due in great part to the program meeting the felt needs of the participant couples where they are and providing them with insights and skills to manage the life they have already chosen within the parameters they have already laid down for themselves rather than too many challenges and visions to aspire to.

Another issue facing pre-marriage educators is that pre-marriage education as practised is not critical. It does not problematise issues but in its helping mode tends to push for pluralism and tolerance rather than critical awareness. The question of the marriage of equals enshrined in family law legislation is

highly problematic to many couples. It has been introduced as a 'given' in many educational programs but there is no opportunity for those yet to be convinced to work through their opposition.

These preliminary ideas and issues provide an introduction to the project itself and its aspiration to discover firstly how many PMEPs are taking place in Australia and what kinds of approaches are used and secondly what the couples' experience is of the programs they attended. The project proper begins with a consideration of its design and operational planning.

Chapter 4

Research design and strategies

Research design

The research design is the overall plan of the research study. It includes planned ways of approaching the questions and tasks to be tackled (excluding those not to be addressed) and the ways the required information is to be collected. As was pointed out in Chapter 1, the research team converted the general brief (in this case, to provide an initial evaluation of PMEPs in Australia) to two specific objectives: firstly, to describe and analyse PMEPs currently being offered in Australia and secondly, to explore the experiences of couples attending PMEPs and the differences they thought the course made to their relationship, their ideas of marriage and marital roles and their intention to marry.

The team decided to use a survey design which, as Connole (1990:67) puts it,

> *involves in essence collecting information from a sample about a population, generally by using structured or semi-structured questionnaires or interviews.*

As a first level evaluative survey, the information required was exploratory and descriptive rather than explanatory since the enquiry was attempting to find out facts and experiences rather than the precise reasons for why things were the way they were. These can be explored further in later research. The first task did not require random sampling since the actual numbers of cases could be managed. In the second, in order to manage the project within the timeframe, all PMEPs held in the first three months of 1992 were taken to represent PMEPs held throughout the year. Having clarified the basic approach, the next question concerned the kind of information required for the study.

Information required

The first task, mapping the PMEP field, required information about the providers of PMEPs, their policies, the number and duration of programs offered, the nature and style of the programs - topics covered and processes used - and profiles of the educators and participant couples involved. Some of this information was quantitative: for example, the number of providers throughout Australia and the number of courses and participants. In addition since, in PMEPs (more perhaps than in educational programs concerned with passing on information or teaching skills), educators and participants were engaged in a very personal way, their various attitudes and styles could be expected to exert a profound influence on the program and would need to be canvassed in the building up of the map of the programs. This information would be more qualitative and interpretive.

The information required for the second task, which concerned the impact of PMEPs, needed to be clearly shaped by their contemporary nature. Contemporary PMEPs, as was pointed out in Chapter 3, tend to use a particular kind of open ended educational approach with a variety of processes and exercises which offer couples the opportunity of giving more or less energy to each depending on their needs and interests. Educational programs of this kind are not directed to specific objectives and assessable outcomes but aim at creating a *facilitative environment* in which participants are encouraged to reflect on themselves and their forthcoming life choice. Given the indirect and facilitative nature of PMEPs, it was not appropriate to look for instrumental and linear outcomes which might be applied in assessing a training program in a specific skill. The information required concerned if and in what way participants had been attracted to use the opportunities offered to reflect on and enrich their relationship and gain skills in marital communication and conflict resolution.

Ways to collect and process the information

The team chose to use questionnaires with additional interviews to carry out the task of collecting qualitative and quantitative information from providers, educators and participants Australia-wide with limited resources and time. Information concerning the *nature and distribution of PMEPs* was solicited using questionnaires to providers, couples and educators. The questionnaires to the educators and providers included open ended questions to allow for individual qualitative information. In the second task, *exploring the impact of PMEPs*, the team developed two major questions. Since PMEPs are designed to be welcoming, facilitative and useful, the first set of questions concerned the couples' satisfaction with the PMEP they attended - administrative processes, topics covered and processes used. Since PMEPs aim to assist couples deepen their relationship, clarify their ideas of marriage and reflect on the resolve to marry, the second set of questions concerned the differences the couples could identify as a result of attending a PMEP in the quality of their relationship,

their ideas of marriage and how they would occupy roles within it and finally, the depth of their resolve to marry. The task was to put these strategies into practice.

The design also specified ways of processing the information. *Quantitative data* were to be processed using SPSS to calculate frequencies and analyse significant correlations between variables. Thus, this study would provide information about the numbers of courses in different states and the number and characteristics of participant couples. It was also to identify and measure significant links highlighted by the study such as between age of participants and their satisfaction with the PMEP or between other variables such as the gender of participants, their current living arrangements or the length of their relationship. In addition, the statistical processes were also used to detect any changes reported by couples as a result of their participation in the PMEPs. It was not the intended purpose of this study to distinguish between the various types and locations of programs, nor to compare the reported outcomes from one program with those of another. Nor was it intended to discriminate between the different approaches and styles used by educators, or the differences in the length of some programs.

The qualitative data - firsthand comments and reflections of couples and educators - had to be read and re-read by the research team. In some cases patterns emerged which could be identified as recurrent, in others the information was highly individuated. This information is reported in excerpts from participants' own words throughout the reporting of the research findings. Having established the details of the design, the planned processes for mapping the field and exploring the experiences of the couples had to be put into practice.

Negotiating collaboration

As a preparation to the first task of mapping the field, the project needed to identify and dialogue with *providers* throughout Australia. An initial list of probable PMEP providers was identified from the membership lists of AAME and CSME, and from the Attorney General's Department. In total 48 agencies and groups were identified. Following this initial exercise, all identified agencies and groups were contacted to seek their participation in the second stage of the study. A letter sought to ascertain whether their PMEPs fitted the following definition adopted in this study:

> A pre-marriage education program is an educative endeavour occuring between one or more facilitators and a group of couples who are in the process of making, or have made a decision to marry. The focus of the program is the couples' preparation for their marriage.

Agencies were also asked to indicate their willingness to administer questionnaires to couples attending their courses in the first three months of

1992. The safeguards of confidentiality and freedom to refuse to participate or withdraw were highlighted. In all, 36 groups and agencies throughout Australia agreed to participate. Some agencies were unable to participate because they were not offering courses during the survey period, others because the programs they offered did not fit this study's definition of a PMEP.

Having established the general research design, it was necessary to apply the general design to each of the two tasks of the project and work out ways to put it into operation.

Mapping the field

Mapping the PMEP field needed to obtain as rich a picture as possible of PMEPs as they were practised in the beginning of 1992. A variety of information gathering techniques were chosen to construct a picture of Australian PMEPs. These included studying promotional brochures describing various PMEPs, additional promotional literature, face to face interviews and mapping schedules to obtain information about providers, programs, educators and participant couples.

The national marriage education conference in Brisbane in September 1991 was used as a forum to commence the collection of information about *PMEP providers and the nature of the programs* being offered. During the conference representatives of each group or agency present were asked to complete a mapping schedule or participate in an interview to obtain a detailed description of their programs (see Appendix A). Each representative was also asked to identify any other agencies or groups they knew of who might provide PME. These names were followed up by the research team. Groups or agencies not represented at the conference were contacted and invited to complete a mapping schedule giving details of their PMEPs.

When this exercise revealed a concentration of PMEPs in the Anglican and Catholic churches, to ensure that this was as accurate a picture of the spread of programs as possible, an additional search for other possible PMEP providers was undertaken. All of the larger church denominations were contacted in each state and asked about their provision of education for couples preparing for marriage. Besides the constraints of the tight timeframe, the national survey of providers was limited by the isolated and often changing nature of non-centrally organised providers. These were often linked to a key person, for example a priest in a particular parish, or to the incidental occurrence of a large number of scheduled marriages generating the need for a one-off program.

The profile of the *PMEP educators* was sought by submitting information sheets to the providers who asked their educators to complete them. The information sheets sought to obtain general demographic information as well as the educators' approaches to their practice using questions requiring

specific answers plus open ended questions inviting more individuated comment (see Appendix B).

Information on the *couples who used PMEPs* was to be obtained through the first of the three questionnaires submitted to participant couples (see Appendix C). Items in this first questionnaire explored the couples' demographic characteristics and their ideas about what their relationship meant to them: its strengths and areas requiring further development.

Exploring the PMEP experience and outcomes

Since the study also concerned the impact of PMEPs on couples, the study needed to gather information from couples before and after they had attended their PMEP and to gauge whether the outcomes continued three months after the program. As has been pointed out above, this part of the enquiry did not aim to validate a defined hypothesis but to discover the benefits or disadvantages of a program, firstly, in so far as participants value their experience of it and secondly, if they link any changes they feel in the quality of their relationship, their ideas about marriage and marital roles or their intention to marry to the educational activity they have experienced. It was thus very much an enquiry into the feelings and reactions of the couples themselves which needed to be collected with instruments that facilitated direct witness of experience by the couples involved.

Asking the couples

The study relied on the participants' perceptions of the nature of their relationship and the extent of their learning derived from the PMEP as the primary source of the information. This approach where the participant's expressed opinions and judgements on marriage and their relationship and their feelings towards the program are taken as evidence of that individual's view is a form of humanistic research. Znaniecki (1969) and Sjoberg (1975) highlight the advantages of such approaches in providing a view of a system (in this case, the couples' relationship and the experience of a PMEP) *through the eyes of the players within that system* - that is, the people who give that system meaning and value by their experience of it. Even if one were to suspect some discrepancies in the degree of correspondence between underlying states and what was consciously articulated in the questionnaires and interviews, a self-report has its own validity. Unless there is deliberate lying (and there seems to be no reason why that should be the case in this instance), the participant believes the conscious articulation to be true. That belief is an act of self and couple definition which is the subjective information being sought in this research.

Findings from other research into the effectiveness of various research methodologies provides further support to the rationale for the selection of self- report methods. Self-report studies and studies without control groups have been found to produce results consistent with more empirically designed studies (Eastman 1983). Gurman and Kniskern (1981) highlight the difficulty in forming a true control group, largely due to the very difficult task of matching persons in each group. Eastman (1983) also highlights evidence which indicates that direct laboratory observations of behaviour tend to be supported by the findings that clients and practitioners report. The question now was to integrate these concerns into the questionnaire design.

Questionnaire design

Designing the questionnaires for the study needed to account for the intrinsic limits of questionnaires themselves as sources of information as well as, in this case, catering for the nature of the clients, the context in which the questionnaires would be filled out and the nature of the information being sought. Bader (1980) has pointed out that in questionnaire based research into marriage education programs, the wide spread of types of program, the characteristics of the individual educators and the nature of the couples who participate in PME will have an impact on any outcomes being explored. Practical considerations such as the time taken to participate in such activities and the timing of that intervention can have an impact on the information being sought. It is also important to note the possible effect that the completion of a relationship focused questionnaire may have on a relationship regardless of the program.

In the light of these caveats and the need to ask the couples and to reproduce their views as accurately as possible, it was planned to design and trial a series of *related questionnaires* and then to send them to as many couples as could be identified and who agreed to collaborate. The questionnaires had to take the couples through a reflective review of their relationship, their ideas of marriage and marital roles and their readiness for marriage linked to the experiences during the PMEPs they had attended. They had to be designed so that some information could be easily quantified and a national statistical profile could be generated. They also needed to provide opportunities for couples to explore their reactions and opinions in their own words. Since, as has been pointed out, some participants could be expected to be reluctant, in order to obtain accurate information from as many couples as possible, the design had also to minimise intrusive elements in the questionnaire and minimise the disruption caused when couples filled out and returned the questionnaire.

The *first questionnaire* (see Appendix C) was to collect descriptive data on the *couples* who attended a PMEP in January, February and March of 1992. The couples were to identify the way they were referred to the course, to describe the benefits they hoped to gain from it and then to comment on several dimensions of their relationship - their level of consensus on a range of relationship issues, their overall satisfaction with their relationship including

their perceptions of what their relationship meant to them, with special reference to its strengths and growing edges, and their ideas on marriage and the way roles might be distributed in their marriage. Couples were also to be asked to indicate the level of commitment to their relationship and to their impending marriage.

The *second questionnaire* (see Appendix D) was designed to examine couples' perceived outcomes from, and satisfaction with the PMEP. In addition to using items repeated from the first questionnaire, additional questions were introduced to gain couples' perceptions of the ways their views of their relationship and forthcoming marriage might have changed as a result of the program they had attended. Couples were also asked to describe the main outcomes from the program for themselves, any new issues that may have arisen and any new skills they may have learnt. General assessment of satisfaction with course organisation, content and processes was measured as well as the couples' perceptions of the helpfulness of the topics and processes to their relationship.

The third questionnaire (see Appendix E) was to be sent out in the third stage of the study some three months after the program, once again using measures from the earlier two questionnaires. Couples were to be asked to reflect for a second time on changes to the quality of their relationship, their ideas about marriage, and depth of their resolve to marry. The purpose of this third questionnaire was to allow for the 'halo' effect (that is, getting past the 'feel good / better' or satisfied stage which tends to occur immediately after most learning programs) and to verify the reported outcomes for the couples as a result of attendance at their PMEP. Two additional questions were to be included in the three month follow-up - one to identify couples who had married since completing their program, and another to identify couples who had postponed or cancelled their wedding.

To gain some idea of the couples' *overall satisfaction* with their relationship, the Relationship Change Scale developed by Schlein and Guerney (1977) was used to develop a scale to measure couple satisfaction with their relationship along a number of dimensions including satisfaction with self and partner, communication, trust, intimacy, sensitivity, openness, understanding and autonomy.

To ascertain couples' *level of consensus* on a range of issues, the Marital Consensus Scale developed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (1989) was used. An item relating to religious beliefs was added, and the term sexual relations was replaced with sexual intimacy. The Family Tasks Inventory, used by King and Groundwater-Smith (1978) in their evaluation of a pre-marriage education program conducted by the Family Life Movment in Sydney, was used to construct a more up-to-date version of an instrument to assess couples' perceptions of the way they believed various roles might be allocated within their marriage relationship. The scale was modified to include statements which examined authority and decision making, household tasks and career and lifestyle issues.

In order to ensure that couples were provided with ample opportunities to describe their experiences of their relationship and the PMEP they attended, each of the three questionnaires contained a number of open ended statements inviting free comment from the couples in their own words.

This post program survey was also complemented with face to face interviews with a small number of couples in three capital cities to seek their comments about various aspects of their relationship and the program they had attended as a kind of spot check on questionnaire responses.

Submitting the couples' questionnaires

Prior to the commencement of the survey period, participating agencies and groups were sent details of how to administer the questionnaires to the couples. Program leaders were asked to explain the purpose of the survey to couples and to ask them to participate. Leaders were asked to stress that couples' participation in the survey was to be voluntary. On completion of the post program questionnaire, couples were asked to indicate their willingness to complete a further follow-up questionnaire three months later, and were asked to provide an address where they might be contacted at that time. The research team undertook to contact these couples and forward the third questionnaire at the appropriate time after the completion of their PMEP. A number of the couples who indicated their willingess to participate in the follow-up phase of the study were contacted and permission sought to replace the questionnaire with a face-to face interview as a means of collecting data using a different but supporting methodology.

The first of the three questionnaires was mailed to the providers who had agreed to collaborate, to be then given to couples in the first session of the PMEP. To safeguard the couples' freedom to participate or not and their confidentiality, couples were asked to complete the questionnaire if they wished or return it untouched in the confidential envelope provided, near the commencement of the first session of their PMEP. The second questionnaire was offered in the same way at the conclusion of the last session of the PMEP. The third questionnaire was mailed to the couples who had agreed to participate at this third stage to their homes with a reply paid envelope enclosed.

Couples' response rates

A summary of the response rates for the study can be found in Figure 2. A total of 1,922 individuals indicated their willingess to participate in the study at its commencement. Of these, 1,698 provided usable responses; 874 respondents were female and 824 male.

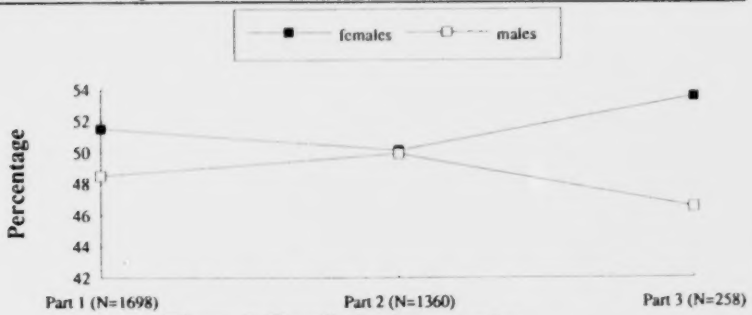

Figure 2: Couples' response rates.

The numbers of respondents varied between states. Table 1 gives details of the respondents in each state / territory, and highlights the numbers of respondents who attended PMEPs in the eastern states, especially New South Wales.

State/Territory	Number of respondents
Australian Capital Territory	221
New South Wales	683
Queensland	151
South Australia	213
Tasmania	14
Victoria	544
Western Australia	96

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by state / territory.

The number of usable responses at the time of the post-program survey was 1360 (71% of the pre-program sample). This total was made up of 682 females and 678 males. At the completion of this stage of the survey, 604 respondents indicated their willingness to be contacted to complete a follow-up questionnaire. Of these, 258 individuals returned the questionnaire in time to be included in the data analysis. This number comprised 104 matched couples and an additional 50 individuals - a response rate of 34%.

Asking the educators

In addition, in order to provide a second (and of course highly subjective) view on the couples' experiences of PMEPs, the research team designed a questionnaire for *PMEP educators* to canvas their views on the participating couples' experiences of the PMEPs they, the educators, had facilitated. The educators were also asked to give their perceptions of the outcomes of the course for the couples, and to note their own levels of satisfaction (as educators) with the topics covered in the course, its processes and its organisation (see Appendix F). Educators were asked to fill out this questionnaire as soon after each PMEP as could be managed so that the impressions and recollections of a particular PMEP would be as vivid as possible.

The questionnaires asking for this complementary information about the couples and their engagement with the program were posted to the providers to be distributed to the educators running the PMEPs. These had a reply paid envelope so that the questionnaires could be returned directly by each individual educator. Of the 161 educators who completed the earlier information sheets, 154 provided responses to this questionnaire.

This chapter has described the research design for the national survey on pre-marriage education programs. The design involved two major tasks, to describe and analyse PMEPs offered in Australia and to explore the impact of these PMEPs on the participant couples. Each of these tasks required different sets of questions and a number of research strategies which have been described in this chapter. The next chapter addresses the first of these tasks in mapping the field of pre-marriage education programs in Australia.

Chapter 5

Pre-marriage education programs in the 1990s

The field of pre-marriage education described in earlier chapters of this book is characterised by a number of features which shape its provision. The context as analysed in Chapter 2 greatly influences the type of program in which couples might participate. A number of dimensions highlighted in Chapter 3 also provide a foundation for understanding some of the rationales underpinning this current provision. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the actual provision of PMEPs using the data collected in the mapping survey.

The agencies and bodies currently providing PMEPs, whether or not they participated in the survey, are presented in the following table by state and city/town/suburb.

State/Agency	Cities/Towns/Suburbs
ACT	
Centacare, Canberra/Goulburn	Canberra, Goulburn
St. John's Care	Albury
New South Wales	
Anglican Counselling Centre	Ashfield, Camden, Campbelltown Manly, Miranda, Penrith, Wahroonga, Wollongong
Centacare, Broken Bay	Arcadia, Brookvale, Forestville, Gosford, Waitara, Wyong
Centacare, Lismore	Lismore
Centacare, Parramatta	Baulkham Hills South, Greystanes, St. Mary's
Centacare, Sydney	Fairfield, Glebe, Hurstville, Kensington, Liverpool, Ryde
Centacare, Wollongong	Campbelltown, Nowra, Wollongong
Engaged Encounter, NSW	
Family Life Movement of Australia	Castle Hill, Kirrawee, Strathfield
Together Programmes	Gymea, Milperra
Uniting Church Board of Education (The Elm Centre)	Sydney

Queensland	
Anglican Family Care	Brisbane, Caloundra, Toowoomba, Warrick
Centacare, Brisbane	Brighton, Fortitude Valley, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Mt Gravatt, Sunshine Coast
Centacare, Bundaberg	Bundaberg
Centacare, Mackay	Mackay, Alligator Creek
Centacare, Rockhampton	Rockhampton
Engaged Encounter, Brisbane	Banyo, Marburg
Good Shepherd Pre-Marriage Team	Mt Isa
Uniting Church, Adult and Family Ministry	Auchenflower
South Australia	
Anglican Community Services	Kensington, O'Halloran Hill
Catholic Family Services	Adelaide, Elizabeth, Hectorville, Henley Beach, Noarlunga
Centre of Personal Encounter (COPE)	Adelaide
Engaged Encounter, SA	
Henly Beach Marriage Preparation Team	Henley Beach
Holy Trinity Church	Adelaide
Marriage Education Team	Mt Gambier
Maughan Church Marriage Preparation	Adelaide
St Teresa's Parish	Whyalla
Vietnamese Marriage Preparation	Adelaide
Tasmania	
Anglicare	Burnie, Devonport, Hobart, Launceston, and other country centres
Engaged Encounter, Tasmania	
Maritas (a collection of all Catholic parish-based providers, including Centacare)	
Victoria	
Anglican Marriage Counselling and Education Services	Camberwell, Frankston, Geelong, Mentone, Mt Waverley, Preston, Yarraville
Ballarat Diocesan Family Services	Ballarat
Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, Geelong	Geelong
Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, Melbourne	Bentley, Essendon, Mulgrave, Ringwood, St Alban's Watsonia
CSME Gippland	Sale
CSME Shepparton	Shepparton
Engaged Encounter	Melbourne, Ballarat
Family Relationships Institute	Coburg

Marriage Education Program, NFP Council of Victoria	North Balwyn, Northcote
Sandhurst CSME	Bendigo, Shepparton, Wangaratta
St. Kieran's Parish Marriage Preparation	Moe
Western Australia	
Anglican Marriage and Family Counselling Services (Kinway)	Perth
Catholic Marriage Preparation and Education Centre	Perth
Engaged Encounter, WA	Perth
Wesley Central Mission	

Table 2: Agencies and groups providing PMEPs

The largest concentration of pre-marriage education programs lies within the Catholic church, followed by the Anglican and Uniting churches respectively. Within other church groups the approach to educating couples for marriage varies greatly. Denominations such as the Baptists, the Salvation Army and the Churches of Christ state that the approach to pre-marriage education depends very much on the individual pastor or minister. Some provide opportunities to discuss their particular ideas about marriage with the couple, others provide printed material which is given to the couples to read and discuss between themselves. Many ministers also use inventories such as PREPARE or FOCCUS to assist them in working with their couples.

Other churches such as the Assemblies of God and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints conduct seminars two or three times a year in which they explore the value of marriage and the place of family within their church communities. The Uniting and Lutheran denominations largely provide pre-marriage education via the use of PREPARE. There are some courses for couples but they tend to be in isolated pockets and are not co-ordinated across a wide number of churches or parishes as is the Catholic or Anglican provision.

Data on numbers of courses were available from brochures of 25 agencies and bodies. In 1992, these organisations were providing a total of 518 PMEPs, the state distribution being as follows:

State	Programs	In agencies/bodies
NSW	178	5
Victoria	173	7
Queensland	69	6
WA	49	3
SA	37	3
ACT	12	1

In Tasmania, there are approximately 18 parish-based Catholic providers of PME who co-ordinate their activities through Maritas, the archdiocesan marriage education association.

The following map of PMEPs, drawn from information contained in brochures from 31 agencies and bodies and supplemented with information from telephone interviews with some agency personnel, analyses their main features and illustrates their essential character with examples.

Philosophies and aims

What do PMEPs purport to do? Essentially, they all aim to provide couples with opportunities to reflect on their relationship prior to becoming married. Much of the literature of the agencies/bodies focuses predominantly on content topics. However, an analysis of these documents does also reveal some statements of aims that provide tone and texture to the nature of the PMEPs provided by these bodies. While many advertise a number of such statements, it is possible to single out key phrases that provide clues as to the philosophy underpinning various agencies' offerings.

Some emphasise discussion in fellowship and networking:

> *sharing their ideals and expectations with other engaged people and marriage educators (CSME, Sandhurst)*
>
> *to provide opportunities for engaged couples to meet with others who are engaged; to encourage the couples to build networks (Ballarat Diocesan Family Service)*
>
> *provide an opportunity for you and your partner to meet with other couples like yourselves and spend time discussing and reflecting on issues relevant to your relationship (Catholic Family Services, Adelaide)*

or focus on the clarification of marital expectations:

> *exploration of the couples' expectations for their marriage relationship (Catholic Engaged Encounter, Vic)*
>
> *help you to think about your relationship as it is now, what you want for yourselves in marriage and the ways and means of achieving this and sustaining it (Anglican Counselling Centre, NSW)*
>
> *provide engaged couples with the opportunity to explore together the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of their relationship (Centacare, Brisbane)*

or stress the exploration of relationship strengths and weaknesses:

> *A PME course explores the strengths of your relationship and helps you*

to identify future trouble spots (Centacare, Sydney)

provide an opportunity for couples to work together on their relationship, to become more aware of their strengths, and to identify areas that require work (Anglican Community Services, Adelaide)

Each individual couple explores their relationship. Strengths are identified to boost confidence and self esteem. Areas requiring change are identified and worked through (Family Relationships Institute, Coburg)

Others concentrate on the development of 'tools' to prepare for married life:

To develop their knowledge, skills and commitment in ways which encourage exploration of the relationship and the setting of realistic goals for marital growth (Centacare, Sydney)

It's great to be in love and we're sure you want to keep it that way. Staying in love is about how you do things together... In this course, you will learn how to have the marriage you've always dreamed about...designed to equip you and your partner with the skills and understanding to continue building and maintaining your partnership with each other (Kinway, Perth)

Provide an opportunity for you to prepare for the challenges and adjustments involved in the transition to married life. Each course is designed to help you and your partner with self awareness, knowledge and skills for your life together (Centacare, Mackay)

We want to provide you with an opportunity to take time out from your wedding day preparations and to prepare for your marriage, the day to day challenges and adjustments that will be involved in this commitment to each other ... by growing in knowledge of your self, growing in knowledge of your partner and focusing on the potential of your relationship (Centacare, Bundaberg)

One of the most significant variables, however, in the programs' philosophies and aims, and therefore in the character and flavour of the programs provided, is the extent to which they espouse Christian purposes/values. Some examples of these include:

Our marriage preparation course is based upon the Bible's teachings about Christian marriage and the Christian household (Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide)

The week-end is heavily oriented toward Catholic teaching and Christian values (Catholic Engaged Encounter, Perth)

...various marriage preparation courses we can offer you are all presented in the belief that in a Christian marriage you, as a couple, are involved in

an experience which involves the loving and powerful assistance of God our Father, who supports your love (Centacare,Bundaberg)

All this will be approached from a Christian perspective and considered from within the framework of Christian values of marriage and married life. Specific teaching on Christian marriage and on the meaning of the marriage service will be given... (Anglican Counselling Centre, NSW)

A major aim ... is to present to and awaken in couples an enriching and challenging view of sacramental marriage (Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, Victoria)

to explain and promote Christian marriage as a sacrament and a vocation (Ballarat Diocesan Family Service)

One other interesting aim of PMEPs is articulated by the Ballarat Diocesan Family Service, and focuses on the benefits to the presenting rather than the participating couples; namely, 'to provide married couples in our parish with an opportunity to enrich their own marriages as they reflect on the issues presented and share their lived sacrament to engaged couples'.

All of these published aims together provide a useful overall picture of the presumed benefits of PMEPs. From a research perspective, they furnish the hypotheses for this study. Whether the programs do actually live up to the ideals of their creators, that is, whether the participants really see the processes and outcomes in the same light as the educators, is the *raison d'etre* of this study.

Organisation

The progams differ markedly in many organisational aspects, such as names, patterns of attendance, venues, facilitators, costs, recommended time of participation, target clients, recruitment, role of FOCCUS/PREPARE, pre-course information, and policies. In fact, the most common attribute is probably the duration of PMEPs, in that they all extend over a relatively brief time as far as educational programs aimed at relationship understanding and development are concerned - they range from approximately 6 to 16 hours in length.

Names of programs

Often agencies simply refer to their programs in a non-descript manner as 'Pre-marriage education' or 'Marriage preparation' courses. Others have given their programs more distinctive titles. Examples include the following:

- Before you say 'I do'
- To have and to hold

- Let's make it together
- Focus on relationship
- Marriage God's way
- Towards loving commitment
- Growing together
- Preparing for marriage
- Preparation for Christian marriage
- People in love
- Is love enough?
- A life long affair
- Approaching marriage
- Let's make it work

These are locally-based or state-based programs where the agencies are free to name their courses in the way they wish. In other cases, where the program is more centrally controlled and directed and adheres to a relatively established format, the titles are not negotiable; for example,

- Catholic Engaged Encounter
- Evenings for the Engaged
- Together as One

Presumably for marketing purposes, several agencies also have catchy and colourful slogans or quotations on their literature in addition to the name of the course. Examples include:

- Plan for your marriage, not just your wedding
- To know, to share, to grow in love
- A wedding is for a day. A marriage is for a lifetime
- Preparing for a wedding and preparing for a marriage are two different tasks
- If I'm going to spend the rest of my life with you, I reckon a couple of days thinking about it makes sense
- Don't ask me to leave you! Let me go with you. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.
- Thinking of marriage? Think of Engaged Encounter
- Its about your life together
- Make the most of your marriage
- Love is your gift from God to each other. Prepare yourself to receive that gift and to give in return
- Relationships work
- Are you prepared for after the wedding?

All PMEPs are in English, except for two programs offered by Centacare Brisbane in Fortitude Valley in Spanish and a program in Adelaide for Vietnamese speaking couples.

Patterns of attendance

The hallmark of PMEP provision is flexibility. The picture nation-wide is a patchwork with just about every conceivable attendance pattern in evidence somewhere. Even within some agencies, naturally the larger ones, alternative patterns are available. Mostly, these alternatives are between a series of weeknights or a weekend. Some programs advertise sessions on, say, a particular evening during the week over 4 to 7 consecutive weeks, each session lasting for between 1.5 to 3 hours. Others are offered over a weekend, either two consecutive Saturdays or Sundays, or both days on the same weekend. Many include Friday evening as part of the weekend. Other patterns are available, though less common than those described. Some programs are live-in; these are mainly (if not exclusively) the Engaged Encounter weekend programs.

The study did not unearth any programs offered by distance education means, and given the nature of the programs, their intents and the couple nature of their participants, this is not altogether surprising. Catholic Family Services in Adelaide offers PREPARE and FOCCUS by correspondence to couples in remote areas or to couples who are geographically separated.

There are other examples of alternatives provided not only because of timetabling or numbers of couples available, but because of that agency's and program's aim to cater for different personality needs and learning styles. For example, Centacare Bundaberg advertises its various courses as appropriate for couples

> *who are not comfortable in a group situation [and] who enjoy the personal nature of working with only one couple*

(Evenings for the Engaged program, available on a one engaged couple to one married couple basis), and couples

> *who enjoy working in a group situation, where they can meet and share with other engaged couples and married couple* (the Marriage Preparation Course).

Again, the Catholic Marriage Preparation and Education Centre in Perth claims its Tuesday evening courses, as distinct from its Sunday courses for large attendances, are 'for smaller groups, up to five couples, with time to talk over things in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.'

Another agency advertises an Evenings for the Engaged program as available for 'two hours per week for six weeks in a presenting couple's home, or three hours per week by self-instruction' (Centacare Sydney).

Venues

The flexibility to cater for different needs is also evident in the venues in which PMEPs are conducted. The majority of programs are sited in agency centres or parish halls/rooms. However, some are provided in facilitating couples' homes to provide a more informal learning climate. Other less common venues include schools, TAFE colleges, community centres and seminaries. Those programs residential in nature are offered in venues with living quarters.

Facilitators

The facilitators of PMEPs are nearly always lay people, and most often volunteer married couples. The most common pattern is for one married couple to conduct a course, sometimes with the specialist assistance of guest speakers. The next most common occurrence is for a lay marriage educator to run the course, again with occasional guest speakers. Sometimes there is a team of married couples, varying between two and four (as in St Kieran's Parish in Moe, Victoria) or five (as in the Centacare Bundaberg program). By virtue of the nature of the Catholic Engaged Encounter program, the facilitators over the residential weekend include a team of married couples and a priest.

Guest speakers are most often used for sessions on matters religious (eg: the sacrament of marriage by a priest), family planning (eg: by a Natural Family Planning educator), finance, law and sexuality (eg: by a medical practitioner).

Respondents and/or brochures in the mapping survey often referred to the facilitators as 'trained marriage educators' (eg: Centacare Rockhampton), 'trained, competent people' (Anglicare, Tasmania), 'committed lay couples' (eg: Uniting Church, Queensland), 'experienced marriage educators' (eg: Uniting Church, NSW), 'accredited marriage educators' (eg: Catholic Family Services, Adelaide; Anglican Marriage Education and Counselling Service, Melbourne) or 'people with a Christian commitment who have been especially selected for their skills and interests' (eg: Anglican Counselling Centre, NSW).

Costs

The fees charged for PMEPs varies considerably, from three progams charging under $30 per couple to two programs of over $120. These latter are the Catholic Engaged Encounter programs where residential expenses are normally incorporated. Most courses cost between $50 and $80. Apart from board and meals expenses accounting for some of the variability, another factor is whether completion of an inventory like PREPARE or FOCCUS is included in the fee. Many programs advertise that it is desirable for a couple to complete such an inventory before enrolling in a PMEP, and in their brochures even

provide a written incentive in the form of discounts. To cite just three examples: Wesley Central Mission in Perth states that the cost of its course is $80, the cost of undertaking PREPARE and feedback session(s) is $80, and that both cost $150 in total; Centacare Sydney gives the cost of its weeknight course as $100, that of completing FOCCUSand feedback session(s) as $90, and if both are undertaken, that the discounted price is $170; and CSME Sandhurst in Victoria cites the fee for its course as $80, with a $10 discount applying for those who have completed FOCCUS.

Many programs are concerned that such fees not prohibit couples from participation, and even advertised in brochures to this effect; for example,

> *Our recommended fee is $60 per couple...; this includes morning and afternoon tea and lunch. If paying this fee is a problem, and you would like to participate, you can choose to pay $50, $40 or $30 (Kinway, Perth)*

> *Cost is $65 per couple. Reductions are available if price is a barrier to attendance (Catholic Family Services, Adelaide)*

Recommended time to participate in a PMEP

Some programs do not state when couples should undertake PME. However, many do recommend to prospective participants an optimal time to attend such a program. Generally, this time is stated to be between three and six months before the wedding, presumed to be a time when they will be able to concentrate fully on developing their relationship before preparations for the important day become too hectic! Some recommend an even earlier attendance:

> *To receive maximum benefit, a [course] should be experienced as early as possible, even before announcing the engagement...* (Catholic Engaged Encounter, Perth)

> *The earlier you attend a program the better, especially couples considering engagement* (Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, Victoria)

> *Our course will be least effective if you attend too close to your wedding date. Enrol immediately you receive this brochure. Six to nine months before your wedding is not too early and is recommended. Enrol as soon as possible after you have decided to marry, even before your formal engagement if you wish* (Catholic Marriage Preparation and Education Centre,Perth)

> *To enable you to gain the greatest benefit from pre-marriage education, you should endeavour to book as long before the wedding as possible, even before you have decided to marry.* (Natural Family Planning Council of Victoria)

> *It is best to attend 4 - 6 months prior to your wedding, or even earlier.* (Centacare Wollongong)

> *The best time to enrol in a pre-marriage course is at least 6 to 12 months before the planned wedding date and even before the engagement announcement if possible* (Centacare, Canberra)

There are other programs which advertise as an integral part of their marriage preparation some follow-up after the course and even after the wedding. The Preparing for Marriage course conducted by Anglican Marriage and Family Counselling Services in Perth is in two parts, each occupying a full day - the first part occurs before the wedding, while the second part takes place 6-18 months after the wedding. Other examples are the Natural Family Planning Council of Victoria which sends details of post-wedding programs to couples who book into pre-wedding programs, and Centacare Sydney which advertises a follow-up course in communication and conflict resolution 9-12 months 'after your marriage'. Anglican Family Care, Brisbane also advertises a follow up day for all couples 6 to 12 months 'after marriage'.

Target clients

PMEPs are, as the name suggests, for couples preparing for marriage. This is expressed in different ways by the various providers, some specifically referring to engaged couples, others generally to couples whether engaged or not. Family Life, NSW advertises its programs 'for couples thinking of getting married' (1991) and 'for couples approaching marriage' (1992); CSME Sandhurst, Centacare Brisbane, Anglican Family Care, Brisbane and Catholic Engaged Encounter 'for engaged couples'; and the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, Victoria generally 'for couples of many ages and stages.'

A few agencies specifically refer to PMEP opportunities/progams for those where one or both parties have previously been married (eg: Centacare Brisbane; Anglican Marriage and Family Counselling Services,Perth; Catholic Marriage Preparation and Education Centre, Perth;) or where one partner does not wish to attend a course (Anglican Marriage and Family Counselling Services,Perth). In these cases, such couples or individuals are usually asked to contact a priest or agency counsellor for an interview or separate brochure. Some agencies advertise 're-marriage' programs (Anglican Marriage Education and Counselling Services, Melbourne) or sessions prior to attending a PMEP for those with step children (Anglican Family Care, Brisbane).

Some agencies specifically report that they receive couples of any religious affiliation, while many others do not make mention of this at all. For example, the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, Victoria markets its programs for 'couples of all religious backgrounds' and states they are 'welcome to attend'; while for Catholic Engaged Encounter, one does not have to be Catholic, but 'the weekend is designed for all couples who are considering being married in the Catholic Church.' The Perth brochure for Catholic Engaged Encounter states that approximately half the couples who attend are planning interfaith marriages. Another Perth brochure from Anglican Marriage and Family

Counselling Services announces it is a Christian organisation, however 'most of the people who participate in our courses do not belong to any church group.'

Recruitment

By far the most common way in which couples find out about a PMEP is through a priest (86%) or parish (25%). Other common means are through family/friends (46%) and through advertisements (46%). Interestingly, agencies claimed that very few participate as a result of self-referral or agency referral.

Half of the agencies reported a 'set referral process.' This frequently takes the form of a priest and parish secretaries, when couples make their wedding bookings, giving them an enrolment form/brochure, and then the couple sending the form and deposit to the agency and/or booking an interview with the coordinator. Sometimes couples telephone an agency to clarify details about courses or discuss whether they want to attend a course at all.

Agencies reported that in some cases, priests state they will not marry a couple if they do not attend a PMEP. Sometimes the couple is free to select the course they will attend, and sometimes the priest specifies the course.

In some instances, it is Diocesan policy (eg: in Rockhampton Diocese) that couples give a minimum of six months notice of marriage, and the priest refers couples onto an agency as soon as possible after their first contact with them - it is the reponsibility of the couples to make contact with the agency themselves. At other times, the referral process depends on parish practice. Some parishes state that PMEPs are compulsory and completion of a program serves as confirmation of the wedding booking. Other parishes refer couples to agency coordinators who explain what the program is about and invite couples to participate.

Role of FOCCUS/PREPARE

FOCCUS and PREPARE are inventories for raising questions and identifying strengths and concern areas for premarried couples so that they can think about and discuss them. Both can only be used by persons (sometimes a priest, sometimes a lay person or couple) who have been specially trained in their use. While they can be administered to individual couples or groups of couples, the feedback session(s) can only be carried out separately with each couple.

Programs which use only these inventories have therefore been excluded from this study by definition, as they involve this specially trained facilitator with only one pre-married couple.

Many programs recommend couples complete one of these inventories and the accompanying feedback session(s) before enrolling in a PMEP, and as

explained above, even offer discounted course fees as an incentive. Where this occurs, the inventory is clearly perceived not as an integral component of a PMEP but simply as a helpful forerunner. This study identified only two programs where such an inventory is built into the actual PMEP as an integral and essential component of the whole course, interestingly at opposite ends of the course. The Catholic Family Welfare Bureau in Geelong has couples complete FOCCUS in the first of an eight session program, and meet and converse with the married couple who will lead their group; the second session is the feedback on the inventory results given by a marriage counsellor at the Bureau; and then the other six sessions are held in the married couple's home and led by that couple. At Holy Trinity Church in Adelaide, PREPARE is completed in session five of the seven nights program, and the feedback session(s) occur from the seventh week as a summarising activity and as a lead-in to other helpful resources as needed after the course itself; in this instance, the venue and the facilitators remain the same for both PREPARE and the other sessions.

Pre-course information

Most agencies/bodies provide pre-course information to couples about to participate in a PMEP. In this study, 86% (n=24) provided such information. Three-quarters of the agencies provided brochures, while other means of communication included letters (25%), letters and telephone calls (11%), telephone calls (11%) and celebrant's kit (4%).

PMEP policies

Approximately 40% of the agencies in this study were reported to have a policy statement on pre-marriage education.

An example of a comprehensive policy is that of the Diocese of Sandhurst in Victoria, consisting of a set of guidelines for the conduct of marriage preparation in that Diocese. Dated 1989, the preamble by the bishop states that they are 'glad to be involved at the forefront of developing a workable, practical policy to assist our parish communities with the vital task of supporting new families through this important area.'

Content

Information on the content of PMEPs was obtained from the mapping schedules that were completed either by program administrators/educators themselves or by the researchers through interview. Schedules were obtained on 28 programs.

The range of subject-matter included in PMEPs is quite diverse given the limited duration of the courses. Insofar as discrete topics are able to be singled

out for descriptive purposes, it is evident that a number are common across most programs, though the extent of coverage on these topics is of course dependent on the needs of both participants and educators and on the time available in any particular program. Such topics include communication, conflict resolution, sexuality, family of origin, finance/budgeting, roles and expectations. Other topics tend to be less common.

Table 3 presents the breakdown of topics for the 31 courses for which there is information.

Topics	Number of courses	Percentage of courses
Communication	31	100
Sexuality	27	87
Conflict resolution	26	84
Family of origin	22	71
Family planning	17	55
Finance/budgeting/ legal aspects	6	52
Christian marriage	16	52
Expectations	15	48
Self-awareness/personality	14	45
Marriage as sacrament	13	42
Roles	13	42
Spirituality	10	32
Change and growth	4	13
Friends/interests	2	7
PREPARE/FOCCUS	2	7
Stress management	2	7
Other	7	23

Table 3: Topics in PMEPs

Some programs tend to have an integrating theme or an important emphasis underpinning their whole program, such as family of origin (eg: CSME Sandhurst, Anglican Community Services, Adelaide), Christian marriage (eg: Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide) or Who am I? (family of origin); I choose you (communication); I accept you (conflict and forgiveness); I marry you (sacrament and covenant; sexuality and family life) (eg: St Kieran's, Moe, Victoria). In programs facilitated by married couples, the content is illustrated as much as possible by sharing from their own experience, not as blueprints but as examples. This is particularly the case in the Catholic Engaged Encounter program, based as it is on that methodology, but is evident also in most other programs.

Many programs have an established content that is modified in terms of breadth and depth according to the needs of any particular group of participants.

There are some programs, however, that offer an extended list of pre-selected topics to couples, who then limit these at the start of their course through group consensus processes. For example, Anglican Marriage and Family Counselling Services, Perth make available to participants a choice of 14 topics; Anglican Community Services, Adelaide offers 13 topics from which the group is to decide on five, in addition to two information sessions on budgeting and sexuality; Family Life, Strathfield has participants discuss a list of topics that they think the course should include.

A few programs include an explicit component that leads to reflection on participants' individual spirituality (eg; Ballarat Diocesan Family Service; Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide; and Catholic Engaged Encounter throughout its weekend format generally but especially within its session on 'Encounter with me'). This appears to be included not only as an evangelical outreach but also as a prelude to exploration of issues facing couples building a Christian marriage, especially couples from different religious affiliations.

Many programs finish with a paraliturgy/mass (eg: Good Shepherd, Mt. Isa; Centacare, Broken Bay; Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, Victoria).

Processes

PMEPs vary in process from being predominantly didactic to being participant-centred. Without direct observation of every program, it is not possible to position accurately a program somewhere along this continuum. Information on processes was gleaned from the mapping schedules and is therefore based on self-report data and not observation (though the researchers do conduct PMEPs of their own and have observed many other sessions in process over the years). Again there is the difficulty of isolating discrete processes or strategies; however, to the extent that this was possible, Table 4 presents a breakdown of the reported processes.

Processes/Strategies	Number of programs	Percentage of programs
Couple sharing	28	90
Small group work	26	84
Worksheets	20	65
Large group work	20	65
Leader sharing	19	61
Role plays	16	52
Didactic	13	42
Slides/OHTs/posters	12	39
Individual work	10	32
Videos/audios	9	29
Brainstorming	7	23
Guest speakers	4	13

Reflection	4	13
Relaxation/songs/games	4	13
Case studies	3	10
Homework	2	7
Other	3	10

Table 4: Processes/strategies used in PMEPS

These provide a clue as to the extent of application of adult learning principles in PMEPs. Any conclusions must be necessarily tentative because of the self-report nature of the data. However, from this analysis, it would appear that, while in most programs the content is relatively set by program administrators/educators, the use of participant-centred processes in marriage preparation is very extensive. For example, considerable efforts are being made to engender supportive and relaxed learning climates; couples are apparently being kept active and involved via worksheets and both individual and couple reflective activities; there is a considerable amount of couple sharing of experience; and efforts are being made to engage couples in goal and/or contract setting procedures. This is evidently a reflection of the use of facilitators trained in adult education philosophies and techniques, and/or experienced in group work approaches through their professions.

Where didactic methods are employed, the sessions are usually on topics such as finance, natural family planning and the sacramental nature of marriage. Audio-visual material, perhaps because of the limited time available or the dearth of high quality resources, is not used extensively, though it is used selectively. Some educators reported using videotapes or segments thereof (eg: Clayton Barbeau on openness; Anger in relationships; one on family of origin) and, even less frequently, audiotapes (eg: of a couple fighting destructively) which they found helpful as trigger material for discussions.

A typical course

A typical start to a PMEP involves some of the following activities: welcome; name tags; completion of a demographic sheet; folders, paper and pens distributed; attention to comfortable seating and setting; introductions/getting to know each other activities to help allay any apprehensions and/or resentment at having to be present (conscripts); icebreaker activities/warmup exercises/introductory games at the start to build learning climate; explanation of housekeeping matters; exploration of couple wants, concerns, expectations, needs; overview of course/aims/structure/process; couple aims and objectives established and their agenda set; and any questions answered.

If there is a pattern during the course itself which is relatively common, it is one that involves an input by presenters, followed by individuals writing answers to questions or working on worksheets, and then couples coming together to discuss the issues as couples, and finally some large group

summarising and debriefing. One program that is standardised in format is Catholic Engaged Encounter; the process involves listening to presentations from a team couple and priest; separating from partner to write their reflections on the topic; and then joining their partner in privacy to share their reflections. Meal times and some non-presentation time offer the only opportunities to socialise with each other and the team, as there is deliberately no group discussion structured into the program.

At the end of a session or day, there is typically a review of activities, any questions answered, the next session introduced and homework (if any) explained. Supper is frequently available either at the end or half-way through a session, when couples socialise with other participants. Some programs, usually those on a weekend, provide a meal in the evening.

Most programs make provision at the end of the course for an evaluation of the overall program. This is undertaken either by discussion or, to ensure anonymity, by questionnaire.

Types of programs

PMEPs differ in nature on a number of important dimensions - degree of Christian emphasis, balance between skill development and knowledge acquisition, extent of group sharing and discussion, as well as all the organisational aspects already analysed. There is, however, from an educational perspective a sense in which PMEPs can be broadly classified into two main types by reference to their content and process:

- There are a number of programs that share considerable overlap in terms of content and process, are predominantly client focused and are relatively unstructured and therefore malleable to the needs of each cohort of participants. These may be grouped together as a bundle of programs that use to varying extents adult learning principles as espoused by numerous writers in the field. Most often the pattern of attendance is one spread over at least two weekends or a number of nights.

- One would be inclined to contrast these with another bundle of programs which draw their content and processes from a pre-established package fairly tightly controlled by State or often international bodies. Their format is structured and participants to a large extent have to adapt to it. Most often the pattern of attendance is a concentrated block over one weekend. The dynamics are therefore different from the first group of programs, and this is not only because of the intensive nature of the program attendance but also because these courses often tend to be evangelistic in their intent.

Having made the distinction on these types of characteristics, however, it is well recognised that some programs lie somewhere in the middle of these two categories, depending upon the characteristic one wishes to focus on. For example, on patterns of attendance, some of the first category of programs are also fairly concentrated in time allocation; on evangelistic intent, many of the first programs are also avowedly on about Christian growth; and on flexibility of format, some of the first programs are relatively structured session by session. Similarly, both categories of program share a number of topics in common, both (mostly) use trained presenters, and both have similar intent in striving to act as a catalyst for couple reflection on the type of marriage to be worked towards. Thus one must necessarily be cautious in drawing too clearly and certainly too rigidly the demarcation line between these two broad types of PMEP.

Nevertheless, such a distinction does seem to provide one way of looking at the types of PMEP on offer in Australia. From the analysis of programs in this chapter, it would be foolhardy simply to lump all courses into one educational basket. So constructing some form of model of PMEP types can serve as a useful heuristic tool for analysing and understanding participants' reactions to the various types of programs that form the latter parts of this book.

Probably the most meaningful framework, therefore, is to think of PMEPs as lying along a continuum and the characteristics above as indicators of positioning. Examples may help to illustrate. At one end would lie programs with structured and established format, such as the Catholic Engaged Encounter or Together As One type of program, which as described below has many of the archetypal features just enumerated under the second category. At the other end would lie programs that exhibit maximum flexibility in structure and format, such as those that allow each group of participants to select through negotiation in the group the particular set of topics and learning experiences that are perceived to be the most relevant to the needs of that group of couples. Such programs are offered by, for example, Anglican Marriage and Family Counselling Services, Perth; Anglican Community Services, Adelaide; Family Life, Strathfield; and Catholic Family Services, Adelaide. The model of PMEPs would look like this:

flexible structure, format and content to meet needs of couples	pre-set structure, format and content to meet needs of providers

Some programs that have a set array of topics but vary content within those topics and methodologies to meet couples' needs during the conduct of the course would be to the left of centre on this continuum. Others that implement a pre-planned course of advertised topics, guest speakers and established processes from program to program and couples fit in as best they can would be to the right of centre. Expressed in its simplest form, the lefthand end could be described as 'activity-curriculum' and the righthand end as 'topic-curriculum', or 'couple-centred' and 'educator-centred' respectively. Some might even label them more bluntly still as andragogy and pedagogy (Knowles 1984). The major features of activity and topic curricula are as follows, adapted from Brady (1992:136-7):

Activity curriculum:

- couple activities are the basis of the curriculum, not the delivering of a body of knowledge
- the interest of the couples is the basis of the curriculum
- the educator ascertains couple interestsand needs and creates educative experiences around them
- there are no core topics
- subject matter is useful only insofar as it shapes activities springing from couple interest
- skills and knowledge are covered as they are needed
- the curriculum is difficult to plan in advance because the educator is continually reacting to the changing needs of couples
- learning experiences are planned by educators and couples together
- the main method is problem-solving.

Topic curriculum:

- all subject matter is classified and organised
- teaching/learning takes place in topics that have clear boundaries of definition
- certain perennial topics make up most of the curriculum
- there is often a hierarchy among topics according to their value
- the choice of topics is decided upon well in advance
- methods are primarily educator directed

The reality is that all PMEPs fall somewhere along the continuum between these two extremes of type. The advantage to pre-marriage educators is that they can place their own programs on this model, reflect on why they placed them where they did, and explore the implications for their own practice. The pragmatic context provided by the analysis in this chapter of the range of

existing PMEPs will assist in this reflective exercise. And so too will the conceptual framework described in Chapter 3 of the three dimensions of PME as human relations education, as church-sponsored activity and as life transition education.

This chapter has presented a snapshot overview of the kinds of pre-marriage programs being conducted throughout Australia in 1992. It illustrates the geographical spread and considerable diversity in organisation, design and delivery of these programs and the largely volunteer effort involved in their presentation. This detailed description provides facilitators of pre-marriage education with an overview of their practice and the larger context of the educational endeavour in which they are engaged at a local level. But for researchers attempting to identify and evaluate such programs and the couples who used them, these disparate characteristics have made the task of identifying completely all the programs being carried out and all their participants extremely difficult. What has been provided is a substantial representative sample which has been put together from considerable investigation and cross checking.

Before exploring the outcomes and effects of the programs as perceived by these participants, it is important to gain a clearer understanding of the people who take part in the PMEPs that have been mapped in this chapter. It is to the educators and couples themselves, then, that the focus of this study now turns.

Chapter 6

The pre-marriage educators

The key figures in any educational program are the educators. They are the architects who transform curriculum into practice and who are responsible for providing environments conducive to learning. It is therefore important to analyse who the educators are in PME, especially as the field is expanding and is so heavily volunteer in nature.

Approximately 200 information sheets were sent to the agencies and bodies who had agreed to participate in this study to collect background information on the people who provide marriage education to couples preparing for marriage. The number of usable sheets returned totalled 161. Exactly how many such educators there are in all the agencies and bodies offering pre-marriage education is unknown, and so caution should be exercised in generalising from the following profile. However, the researchers from their knowledge of the field are confident that the number responding is not far short of the total number and that they represent a wide cross-section of agencies and states.

The educators worked for 26 different agencies and bodies spread across all six states and the ACT. The highest numbers in this sample came from Anglicare, Tasmania and Anglican Counselling Centre, Sydney (9 apiece), followed by Marriage Education Program, Victoria, Centacare Brisbane, Catholic Family Services, Adelaide and Catholic Marriage Preparation, Perth (all 8), and then Centacare Sydney, Family Life Movement of Australia and Catholic Family Welfare Bureau Geelong (all 7).

Demographic characteristics

Fifty eight percent were females and 42% males. There was a wide spread of ages, over two-thirds being between 35 and 54 years:

25 - 34 years	19%
35 - 44 years	38%
45 - 54 years	32%
55 - 64 years	9%
65 and over	2%

The great majority were born in Australia (83%) or the UK (9%). Three educators were born in each of NZ and Malta, two in Holland, and the remander were from single countries such as Burma, Eire, El Salvador, Nigeria and Italy.

Eighty eight percent were married, 10% were single and the rest were divorced, separated or marital status was not given.

By religion, 68% were Catholic, a slightly higher proportion than in the case of the participants. Fourteen percent were Anglican, 7% Uniting Church and 3% Baptist. Another 8% described themselves as Christian.

The most intriguing characteristic of the educators was the great diversity in educational and occupational background. They were generally a well educated group, with over two-thirds holding tertiary diplomas (19%), bachelor's degrees (29%) or postgraduate qualifications (23%). Another 13% held other post-secondary qualifications from TAFE and business colleges. The following tables illustrate the diversity. Table 5 presents the range of discipline areas of their qualifications, Table 6 the titles of their awards, and Table 7 the spread of occupations in which the marriage educators work during the remainder of the week.

Education		**Humanities**	
Teaching/Education	32	History	12
Physical Education	2	English	6
Adult Education	1	Philosophy	5
		Languages	3
		Politics	2
Social Sciences		**Sciences**	
Psychology	13	Science	12
Social Work	11	Maths	4
Sociology	6	Computing	1
Counselling	1		

Theology/Religion	
Theology	15
Religious Education	4
Other Disciplines	
Nursing	6
Law	3
Cartography	1
Speech Pathology	1
Engineering	1
Architecture	1
Dental Science	1
Surveying	1
Physiotherapy	1
Building	1
Metallurgy	1
Librarianship	1
Planning	1
Technology Studies	1

Business/Management	
Business Studies	3
Accounting	3
Home Economics	2
Farm Management	1
Management	1
Personnel Management	1

Table 5 : Discipline areas of the marriage educators' post-secondary qualifications (can be more than one per person)

Education/Teaching	
Dip Ed	13
Grad Dip Ed and Management	1
Grad Cert in Ed	1
B Ed	9
Dip Primary Teaching	9
Dip Phys Ed	1
Dip Teaching Adults	1
Dip Technical Teaching	1
Cert Teaching	1
Social Work/Social Science	
M Social Work	1
Grad Dip Social Work	1
Grad Dip Marital Therapy	1
B Soc Admin	1
Ass Dip Social Work	1
Cert Social Work	1

Humanities	
MA	6
Grad Dip in Public History	1
Grad Dip Archives	1
BA	28
Sciences	
B App Sc	7
B Sc	8
B Eng Sc	1
Dip Biochem	1
Dip App Sc	1
Cert Metallurgy	1
Business/Management	
B Commerce	2
B Bus	1
Dip Bus St	1
Dip Bus	1
Ass Dip Farm Management	1

Theology/Religion		Bus Cert	1
Grad Dip Religion Studies	2	**Other**	
Grad Dip Theology	1		
B Theology	7	PhD	3
Licentiate in Theology	1	LL M	2
Dip Religion	3	B D Sc	1
Dip Leadership Studies	1	BA (Planning)	1
		Dip Cartography	1
		Ass Dip Bldg	1
		SEN	6

Table 6: Titles of the marriage educators' post-secondary qualifications (can be more than one per person)

Very few of the marriage educators have qualifications specifically in that field. That is to be expected with such little availability of relevant courses (non-formal training for marriage educators is discussed later). There is, however, a preponderance of disciplines that could be considered to have some direct relevance to pre-marriage education, such as teaching/education (35), psychology (13), social work (11), sociology (6) and counselling (1). In addition, there is a relatively strong representation of the theology (15) and religious education (4) fields of study. Others have studies in areas that could also be helpful background in particular areas of pre-marriage education, like nursing, business and accounting, law and the humanities generally. Among this wide range of qualifications are three doctorates and nine masters degrees, as well as a number of graduate diplomas in various fields.

Secondary Teacher	14	Counsellor	7
Primary Teacher	7	Psychologist	5
Marriage Educator	6	Social Worker	5
Marriage Ed. Coordinator	3	Registered Nurse	4
Teacher (unspecified)	3	Family Support Worker	2
Educational Manager	2	Health and Life Skills Consultant	1
Training Officer	2	Coordinator: welfare	1
Secondary School Principal	1	Nutritionist	1
University Lecturer	1	Physiotherapist	1
Adult Educator	1	Residential Care Worker	1
TAFE Teacher	1	Voluntary Worker	1
Primary School Principal	1		
TAFE Deputy Principal	1	Manager	3
Education Officer	1	Bank Officer	2
Personnel and Training	1	Farm Manager	2
NFP Teacher	1	Newsagent	2
NFP Director	1	Member of Parliament	1
		Dental Surgeon	1

Priest/Clergy	14	Scientist	1
Industrial Chaplain	1	Analytical Chemist	1
Married Deacon	1	Environmentalist	1
Church Pastoral Worker	1	Cartographer	1
		Surveyor	1
Homemaker	27	Urban and Regional Planner	1
Student	5	Computer Programmer	1
Retired	3	Historian/Museum Curator	1
		Accountant	1
		Public Servant	1
		Clerk	1
		Secretary	1
		Technical Officer	1
		Research Officer	1
		Building Consultant	1
		Business Proprietor	1
		Plumber	1
		Taxi Proprietor	1
		Financial Counsellor	1
		Supervisor	1

Table 7 : Occupations of the marriage educators

Few of the respondents (9) gave marriage education specifically as their main occupation. The predominantly volunteer nature of the field means that there is considerable diversity in the working lives of these educators. Common occupational areas were teacher/educator of various types and levels (particularly in secondary education), clergy, counsellor, psychologist, social worker and homemaker. Again, these are occupational areas that have a considerable relevance to pre-marriage education, a link that may well be a strong magnet in attracting people with these types of occupational background to be volunteer marriage educators. In their roles as pre-marriage educators, only 40% were paid. The volunteer nature of this field is therefore very significant (60%).

As pre-marriage educators, most either worked with their partner (44%) or with a team (41%). Some (11%) worked alone, while a small proportion described some other kind of working relationship. The mean length of time these educators had been involved in pre-marriage education was 49 months, with a range from three months to 16 years.

A typical PMEP educator

From the data obtained in this survey, then, a profile of a typical pre-marriage educator can be drawn as follows:

- most likely female
- between 25 and 54 years of age
- married
- Australian-born
- Catholic
- be in any number of occupations, most likely teaching/education of various types, homemaking, clergy, counselling, social work or psychology
- have a tertiary diploma, degree or postgraduate qualification, most likely to be a BA, Dip Ed, Dip Teaching, B Ed, B Sc, B App Sc or B Theology
- have a content specialisation in teaching/education, theology, psychology, history, science or social work
- works as a PME educator in a range of agencies and bodies anywhere around Australia
- works as a PME educator with his/her partner or a team
- four years experience as a PME educator
- most likely a volunteer PME educator.

How they were recruited to work in pre-marriage education

Most educators became involved in PME through personal invitation. The two most common sources were other PME educators and local clergy. Others included friends in the local church, the bishop, the State Coordinator and spouses. They were asked because they were recognised to have the necessary attributes, and/or because they were or had been involved in Marriage Encounter or local church programs, in marriage guidance, or worked as a counsellor, or taught natural family planning, or taught sexuality in Catholic schools, or were interviewed for and employed in marriage and family education workplaces.

Others volunteered, some simply through answering advertisements in the parish bulletin, others after attending an information evening or voluntarily completing a training course. One simply wrote, 'I appointed myself', another 'I approached the agency', while yet another confessed that his recruitment had been the result of 'skulduggery'!

Some agencies have policies which explicitly state the characteristics required of people who are to be recruited into the role of marriage educator. Two examples are given to portray agencies' ideas of the type of person considered appropriate. The first is taken from the policy document of Centacare in Sydney:

CENTACARE COMMUNITY EDUCATION
Desirable qualities of an appropriate marriage educator

Centacare Sydney has no requirement that marriage educators have academic qualifications or be married themselves. However, we do require that educators have the personal qualities and skills as outlined below:

- willingness to minister Catholic values and principles
- be sensitive, flexible and creative in relationships with persons of different educational and faith levels
- be an articulate speaker
- have an understanding of the Catholic Church and its role in marriage
- be a 'good' communicator and demonstrate the ability to listen and to empathise with individuals and groups from a variety of backgrounds and of different ages
- commitment to the mission of Centacare Catholic Community Services
- caring and non-judgemental attitude
- ability to organise and be responsible for sessional work
- have a confident, relaxed and assertive approach to dealing with people

The second example is quoted from the Diocesan Marriage Preparation Policy of another agency, the Sandhurst Catholic Society for Marriage Education in Victoria, which specifies the following criteria for the recruitment of marriage educators:

MARRIAGE PREPARATION POLICY FOR THE DIOCESE OF SANDHURST

In considering recruitment of couples to work in assisting others to prepare for marriage, the following guidelines are recommended by Sandhurst C.S.M.E.

- couples acting in the capacity of leadership should be sensitive, honest and open, accepting individuals and their values
- they should have an understanding of the theories of adult education and practise these principles in program presentation
- couples should undergo some initial training and be willing to update their skills either by attending an annual conference of C.S.M.E. or attending a State or Diocesan workshop as organised by Sandhurst C.S.M.E. or FOCCUS training sessions as applicable
- be open to explore various methods of presenting programs and possess skills that will enable them to evaluate the effectiveness of various materials which become available
- be aware of the necessity to encourage participants' awareness of the ongoing process of marriage education including relationships courses before and after the wedding day

How they were trained for the role of PME educator

The educators were asked whether they had received any specific training for their role as a pre-marriage educator. Analysis of their responses suggests that there are four main ways to become equipped for the role of pre-marriage educator. Many educators, of course, would have used more than one of these processes.

(a) No formal training
This refers to no formal training in pre-marriage education specifically, but able to transfer generic professional skills and knowledge into pre-marriage education.

These individuals or married couples have already trained as professionals, such as teachers, social workers or counsellors. A glance through the occupations of the educators indicates that this is a very common background and path into pre-marriage education. They may then supplement this base with a range of more informal activities, such as reading, and attendance at workshops, seminars and conferences. Many of the respondents drew attention to their experiential learning within marriage as the way in which they have been equipped to be pre-marriage educators

eg: *practical experience of 22 years of marriage*; and
lived experience of 28 years of Catholic married life.

(b) Limited formal training
Some agencies provide a limited training which furnishes an information base centred primarily on the content of the PMEPs that the new educators will be facilitating. This training can take many different forms:

- attendance at day and/or evening workshops specifically on premarriage education, conducted by experienced marriage educators and/or the National Marriage Education Trainer
- observing educators conducting PMEPs and discussing the program with existing team members
- attending workshops, lectures and seminars on specific topics (like family of origin)
- ongoing team meetings where fellow educators share ideas and new techniques
- FOCCUS and/or PREPARE/ENRICH training days and half-days
- personal development and human behaviour workshops on specialist topics (like conflict management, communication skills, adult education principles, leading groups and small group dynamics)
- issued with a Leaders' Manual
- attendance at AAME/CSME conferences at State and/or national levels
- formal study as a small component of an allied degree (such as theology, social work, counselling, education)

(c) Specific formal training
This is offered through the Marriage Encounter and/or Engaged Encounter movements.

Some educators train in the internationally established model of supporting team couples through a process of writing talks according to detailed guidelines and using experienced couples to workshop talks before presentation. Discussions centre on understanding and learning the concepts of the live-in weekend.

There is often also inservice training on weekend presentations, and feedback from team leaders on initial presentations. Couples further their skills and knowledge base through many inputs at community enrichment evenings.

(d) More extensive, formal training in marriage education.
A number of educators have had a more substantial training specifically in marriage education through a more extensive training program that can stretch over six months and even over periods of up to two years part-time. Such programs are offered by a small number of the more centralised agencies, such as Catholic Family Services and the Centacare agencies. Participants are encouraged to develop a conceptual framework as well as the process skills that will enable them to facilitate PMEPs in the most appropriate and effective manner. Sometimes this may take the form of inservice training, where the participant gradually delivers more and more sessions, is supervised by another educator, then begins to deliver a whole course supervised, and then finally solo. A few educators referred to training through taking a TAFE course in marriage education offered in Brisbane. Some others mentioned formal training through Marriage Guidance or Family Life programs.

Given this very wide range of mostly non-formal approaches and activities, then, it is not surprising that most of the educators claimed to have had at least some training for their role as pre-marriage educators.

How they described their way of working in PMEPs

This study did not involve direct observation of programs in operation because of the restricted time to complete the research and the scattered provision of programs across the country. Therefore, in order to capture the flavour of the educators' intentions concerning the conduct of PMEPs, they were asked to express in writing how they would describe their way of working in such programs.

The educators volunteered a number of discrete terms to describe their roles, such as facilitator, leader, presenter and support person. While these terms are revealing in themselves, however, what is of greater assistance in obtaining

a picture of the styles of educating are the analyses of the actual ways in which they work in the programs. These analyses are presented below, categorised in terms of the different roles/styles adopted. These categories are not meant to indicate that they are necessarily discrete; the educators naturally assumed different roles/styles at different times depending on the stage of the program and the nature of the activity. Together, these analyses portray the diversity in approaches taken by PME educators which is necessary background for understanding participants' reactions to the programs they attended (see Chapter 8).

By far the most common role described by the educators was that of ***facilitator.*** This term can of course mean different things to different people. The quotations demonstrate these various meanings, with the common thread being the helping of couples to reflect on their own relationship and work towards evolving their own model of marriage with minimal input from the educators. Such an approach centres on the considerable use of techniques like individual reflective exercises, partners sharing within each couple, and small group discussion of issues. Interactive processes, stemming from the needs of couples rather than from the dictates of set curricula or from the prepared presentations of educators, are the hallmark of this approach.

> *I'm the skeleton and the couples provide the flesh from their own experience.*
>
> *I see my role basically as that of a facilitator. I do not have all the answers for myself, let alone anyone else. I share my experiences and insights and then step back and allow couples share theirs between themselves. I aim to get them communicating with each other to the greatest level that they are capable of.*
>
> *Getting couples to reflect deeply on themselves, past, present and future, and their relationship. Assisting couples to architect the marriage of their choice.*
>
> *An attempt to be client-centred in an attempt to empower couples to make choices and use skills that will enable them to have a happy and healthy and effective as well as growing relationship.*
>
> *I try to operate as a facilitator, helping couples to reflect on their relationship and their future marriage through their participation in experiential activities. I try to engage them in activities to the extent that they are challenged by what they experience rather than what they hear from me as an educator...*
>
> *I see myself as a facilitator who allows the participants to seek out their own answers to questions.*

> *I'm a facilitator who encourages clients to participate at a level that is comfortable to them.*
> *... working with the group, with the group setting their own goals - what they want to know.*

> *Facilitating self and couple disclosure designed to encourage the participants to openly and honestly explore issues across a range of areas critical to successful marriage.*

It is interesting to note that this model of operation was not seen by all respondents to be an easy one. Some felt open enough to admit their own limitations in adopting this approach; for example, '[I am] never satisfied with my own ability to draw the couples out'.

A second role was ***leader***. Educators working within this model generally saw themselves as leading couples through an established program:

> *Guided by comprehensive course curriculum ...*

> *As a leader couple, presenting a set format so that specific topics will be covered ...*

> *We follow the program set out in ...*

> *My partner and I share the leading role...*

> *Leading a small group of engaged couples...through a range of areas important in marriage - allowing them to learn from our experience, the input from other engaged couples and giving time for them to discuss issues together privately.*

> *Lead them through the set program.*

> *Basically follow the program as it is laid out in our leader's manual.*

A third role was ***presenter***. The predominant style adopted in this case was more didactic than facilitative. Most if not all the educators would have used this style to some degree in their program. However, some evidently saw their role as mainly that - presenting information and sharing experience - either because they personally preferred it or because they believed the subject-matter led them in that direction.

> *I am asked to talk on marriage from the Church's point of view. I try not to be heavy but share with the couples on issues of freedom, family, faithfulness, feelings and fun. I present and people can ask questions. I like to feel the people are with me...*

More as a teacher on the basic understanding on the Church's view of marriage from the point of freedom, fidelity and family within the context of a Christian vocation to be one.
I present material for the consideration of individuals, couples and groups which addresses issues involved in marriage.

I conduct sexuality sessions as team leader. These sessions are not really conversational, so I work as a presenter rather than a facilitator

Provide general information...Large group - lecture format using prepared overheads. Some lecture style work with AV material and group participation throughout. Leading discussion - reflection sessions by providing input and questions. Work as a couple team. Joint lecture style in a small group setting.Lecture with the use of some overheads.

I and my co-leader present information verbally and visually (diagrams, etc. on the OHP), use interactional activities ..., facilitate couple and group discussion. Handouts are presented as summaries and suggested follow-up activities which become a working manual.

It was interesting to note one respondent's account of moving away from the didactic approach:

Originally a lecture on spirituality within marriage ... More recently, leading individuals in writing up a worksheet, discussing it section by section with their parther and finally having the opportunity to share with the whole group.

A fourth role was resource or support person. These educators were the ones who tended to use set workbooks as their prime resource. In this case, the predominant style of the PME educator is to respond to individual or couple questions as they arise, clarify and extend the program's topics where necessary and encourage and foster couple discussion.

... couples work from workbooks with minimal input from educators.

Leading engaged couples through a workbook so that important issues can be discussed.

Two key themes cut across these various roles and shine clearly through many of the descriptions furnished by educators of the way in which they work in PMEPs. The first theme, a very common one, is the emphasis on ***self-disclosure and sharing*** of the educators' own experiences, especially marital experiences. This approach is particularly prevalent, by definition, in the Engaged Encounter programs but is also common in most other PMEPs as well, especially when the educators are married couples. One of the purposes of this approach is to open couples to sharing. Another purpose is to model married life.

We share a lot of ourselves and our marriage relationship - strengths and weaknesses - and thereby hope to provide a realistic groundwork for them to open up and talk about their relationship.
We present ourselves as models through our life experience.

My husband and I work together. We seek to be open about our marriage and to offer it as a resource to the couples...

... through our marriage we have had a lot of ups and downs, difficult times and happy. I believe sharing these with the couples really helps them to see there is always hope - you can if you really want to. These comments are based on what couples have told me.

Interacting lovingly with my spouse. Showing the group the full spectrum and gambit of married love in our interaction.

Draw on our own experiences as a married couple having already coped with these areas within our own relationship.

My wife and I share different aspects of our marriage of 28 years. We show the ups and downs and how we cope with problems. We share our deep love for each other and encourage the couples to aim for a marriage built on trust, fidelity, friendship, sacrifice and love.

As a team couple, my husband and I... share (not teach) all aspects of our married life as a catalyst for the couples to open up and share themselves with their fiance.

Providing a model of a married couple committed to the priorities of married life.

It is significant to note that the belief of some educators that sharing their own marital experiences is helpful to couples preparing for marriage is not held so strongly by all PME educators. For example, one educator, who would be more in the facilitative than the presenting model, remarked,

I prefer the couples to draw from their life experiences in exercises rather than hear of mine.

Interestingly, there were sometimes hints of differences in the ways in which married couples worked in PMEPs. This only serves to underline the point that each educator has a particular style, and to add an element of realism to the modelling that such married couples as educators hoped would be helpful for program participants.

I like using the whiteboard (a lot - it contrasts with my partner who just likes talking!).

I work best if I'm not too structured but go with the flow/feel of the group. Preparation is important but I can deviate - which can be annoying to my husband.

The second common theme in the educators' descriptions is the frequent reference to ***adult learning principles***. This undoubtedly reflects the strong emphasis over the past decade or so in training activities and marriage education conferences on adult learning theories. But what exactly do respondents mean when they use this cliche?

Comments seemed to indicate that most often educators were thinking of *learning climate*:

I use adult learning principles - relaxed, honest, non-threatening approach;

...providing a safe environment for couples to actively work on their relationship;

...create friendly, open atmosphere;
...non-threatening atmosphere;
...create warm, caring atmosphere;
...relaxed and easy-going atmosphere.

Some had *involvement and participation* clearly in mind:

We use active learning strategies based on principles of adult education. Couples are encouraged to participate in large and small group activities and discussion, private reflection and couple sharing exercises.

Others were referring to *variety in methods*:

Adult education model involving formal presentation and input, part didactic, interaction with the group, part couple/group activities and processing couple/group activities.

Still others meant a *focus on participant needs* and *responsibility for own learning*:

Couples are encouraged to identify their particular needs and adult education techniques are employed, allowing the participants to be responsible for their own learning.

Adult educator: allowing the couples to set the agenda, with all the team slotting into the framework for that weekend.

In summary, an enlightening profile - as perceived by the educators themselves - can be obtained from their descriptions of the characteristics of PME educators and of their *modus operandi* in a PMEP. The following features were mentioned many times by respondents in the course of describing how they work in PMEPs:

highly enthusiastic, believing in what I am presenting
very well organised
softly encouraging them towards a healthy relationship
learner-centred
positive
energetic
always open to the ideas and thought and opinions of others
non-judgemental and value free
flexibility to adapt the course to participants' needs/expectations
draw on experience, knowledge, skills of the group
model the skills in the way we present
respect the uniqueness of each couple
challenge couples
humour with true feelings
friendly, caring, professional
aim at being real, to allow others to be themselves
always use a wide variety of educational strategies
teaching inductively and experientially
responding to the needs of the group in as varied and interesting way as possible
keep it friendly
aim to give couples plenty of space to discuss between themselves
avoid jargon, remain down to earth and flexible to adjust to couples' needs
relaxed casual approach to the group, rather than encouraging teacher/student relationship
appreciate the faith dimension in a marriage
personal contact with couples based on Christian principles
bring a personal touch to the practical topics for discussion... endeavour to give them options and insights into the complexities of their own personalities and their special relationship... encourage them to be open, honest and thoughtful.

The above list of attributes is an interesting extension, from the practitioners' standpoint, of the more formal policy statements of agencies quoted earlier in this chapter. It can also be compared with a recent study (Simons and Raftery 1991) using a small group brainstorming process with 11 experienced and senior marriage educators of the role of marriage educator. That study identified the following sample cluster of personal qualities which could be considered in the recruiting of prospective practitioners and/or in the selecting of appropriate learning experiences for the training of educators:

- intuition: a capacity for the perception and understanding of personal and relationship issues, arrived at without careful and rational analysis;
- flexibility: a preparedness to respond to a diversity of individual and couple needs;
- self-awareness: a high level of insight into own intra and inter personal functioning;
- commitment to self-development: a willingness to pursue own personal growth through experience or participating in organised learning activities; and
- personal commitment: a demonstrated knowledge and acceptance of the values underpinning the program; this implies a commitment to the value of the marriage relationship.

It also defined five areas of competence in the occupational profile of a marriage educator, comprising a total of 99 competencies:

- working within an agency/organisation (7 competencies)
- developing a training foundation (19 competencies)
- administering a course (10 competencies)
- preparing a session/course (11 competencies)
- delivering a session/course, including managing a session, working with groups and working with couples (52 competencies)

All of these sources provide a composite profile of the role and work of a marriage educator. The over-riding impression from this study's sampling of features is of a dedicated and committed cohort of pre-marriage educators who strongly believe in what they are doing - a description that would undoubtedly apply to most volunteer endeavours. That pre-marriage educators perceive themselves in this way, despite their often serendipitous and haphazard recruitment and their relative lack of specific training opportunities, is indeed encouraging for the future of the field.

What the educators are most concerned about when they work in PMEPs

Educators express concerns that may be classified as immediate and long-term. The more immediate concerns focus on the participants, themselves as educators or specific aspects of a program. The longer term concerns generally centre on the couples' future marriages.

Concerns about the participants

One of the major concerns of some educators is effectively dealing with *reluctant learners*. These are the participants that have been told to attend by their minister, their partner or someone else, and therefore are not particularly keen to participate. 'These', said one respondent in a stroke of understatement, 'are a challenge'.

> *Difficulties in presenting programs to couples who don't come along voluntarily ... 'We don't need it' mentality.*
>
> *Attending to negative feelings some participants experience as a result of being pressured to come.*
>
> *Defusing of hostility*
>
> *The degree of anger in those whose celebrant has insisted they attend*
> *Couples attitude that 'we know all about each other'.*
>
> *Couples being forced to do the course and accordingly not taking a serious approach to the course.*

Other concerns about participants were the 'young ones', those 'couples rushing marriage and its preparation', those resisting any preparation and who say they know it all, and those who 'leave preparation too late and are pre-occupied with the frills of the wedding day'. In general, the difficulty was expressed as 'catering for such a wide range of abilities/needs of couples'.

Concerns about themselves as educators

Specific concerns were articulated about their own adequacies as PME educators. These included:

> *... whether I am expert enough in some areas*
> *We have adults in our sessions - do we know what we are talking about?*
> *... that I have at my disposal a variety of learning experiences with the required resources*
> *... that I facilitate the debriefings each time as effectively as I am able, How well prepared am I?*
> *... my own performance - style, strategies, content, etc.*
> *... that as a presenter I can relate both to my partner and to the couples*
> *... that I am relaxed and able to be with the group*
> ... that I can be relevant to the couples, that I do not seem to be far removed from where they are now

These occasional self-doubts surfaced in such statements that they were concerned not to use self as an example and that they hoped couples were learning the things that they feel they need and not me force-feeding them.

Concerns about aspects of the program

By far the most numerous concerns were about specific aspects of their programs. These ranged from the more simple areas of room geography, print and audio-visual resources, and session starting and finishing times to the more complex psychological aspects of learning climate, group dynamics and rapport. They were concerned that they introduced the issues in such a way as to 'ensure that the couples participated fully in discussing them', and that their course was 'relevant and up-to-date': that the material is of interest/ relevance to all the participants - sometimes I feel uncomfortable because I think 'the course in parts is too basic to be challenging' that the topic or content of 'the discussion is on track with couples' requests or needs' relevance to the stated needs of the couples; relevance to the unstated needs of the couples and in the expectations of Christian values and teaching.

There were also concerns about issues of balance. A difficult one for some educators is 'getting the balance between helping the couples to explore what they want out of marriage and how to get it, with my beliefs of what marriage can offer if they choose it'.

Another dilemma is the amount of Christian emphasis, 'whether they would be turned off if I discuss religion topics', 'trying not to be too preachy', and 'We do very little religion because we are wary that the group is usually non-active'. Yet another is keeping a balance between activities, particularly facilitator input in balance with couple time.

Other educators were concerned that the experience should be fun, enjoyable, interesting and positive. One, however, was concerned that in a program like our's, there is little flexibility because we work to an outline and obviously not every couple will respond to the same input.

Several educators mentioned lack of time as a concern. Perhaps because of time, one educator's concern was that 'we are only chipping away at the edges most of the time and not reinforcing'. For another respondent, however, the problem was 'a lack of national standards, a lack of financial support and a lack of first class training'.

Longer-term concerns

One of the most important longer term concerns was that couples would continue working at exploring their relationships and seeking ways of enhancing them and letting them grow. Educators were concerned for couples to recognise clearly that their relationship involves more than 'being in love',

that it is a dynamic thing, that they will change and that there are skills they can learn to deepen their partnership. The skills most often mentioned were the ability to communicate, to acknowledge and express feelings and to resolve conflict. This respondent's concern echoed the feelings of many other educators:

> *[that] couples gain a positive view of their relationship and an increased awareness of the need for commitment, a good support system, effective communication and conflict management.*

One respondent expressed this concern as encouragement to

> *reframe problems/conflicts into opportunities to grow and provide practical suggestions through role playing. This I believe is crucial if the course is going to have long-term value.*

Another important concern was that couples would seek outside resources to help their relationship when the need arose later. Educators were concerned that, when conflicts arise, couples knew when and how to deal with these and were prepared in fact to accept counselling as a possible step, not as a sign of weakness.

Other frequently expressed concerns were variants on these twin themes of working at marriage and seeking assistance when necessary. Some representative examples are quoted below on the nature of marriage, the role of a PMEP and the significance of educators watching for potential problems:

- **that marriage is a lifelong commitment**

> *marriage is for keeps*

However, educators were fully aware that some couples may not be going ahead with marriage:

> *As some couples re-evaluate their decision to marry, I highlight the value of this and recommend such couples to have counselling.*

- **that marriage takes effort**

Many educators were concerned that they got across to couples that 'marriage can/does work if you are prepared to put time and effort into it'". Their concern was that couples are not aware of the need for work in the marriage relationship.

> *They operate on an assumption that it will just happen because they love each other.*

- **that couples are to create their own model of marriage**

> *I want to stress the flexible nature of marriage and that couples are at liberty to create the kind of marriage that they want.*

Getting assumptions and expectations out in the open. Couples talking together about the sort of marriage they want and what they expect of each other.

Facilitating couples to develop a model for their own marriage they are both comfortable with.

- **that a PMEP is not all they need, and is not the end step**

Leaving them with the notion that marriage education should be a lifelong process. The inevitability of change in marriage and its relationship.

To stress the power people have within themselves to make their marriage succeed.

Equipping couples to handle life's stresses - encouraging them to enter marriage fully aware of their own and their partner's strengths and weaknesses.

Encouraging them to see that God can be made Lord of their marriage.

- **that educators remain alert for signs of possible difficulties**

These were seen to include:

couples who really require counselling
power structures in some relationships
people who have come from abusive backgrounds

see patterns of behaviours and hear comments which indicate possible domestic violence

I often see relationships where oppression is being incorporated into the foundation of the marriage. In one group we had three joking references to violence as a means of problem-solving. Confronting this without antagonising individuals is a hot issue.

Another respondent drew attention to a further difficulty in confronting such problems:

as marriage educators because of the confidentiality act we are unable to make any formal statement about anything untoward in the couple relationship, such as anything in the future that could be considered to be just cause in seeking an annulment. ... this concerns me greatly.

This chapter has analysed the educators who work in pre-marriage education programs around Australia. Like their programs analysed in Chapter 5, the educators are also characterised by their tremendous diversity, in terms of both their personal backgrounds and their *modus operandi* in the programs. Such diversity, however, belies the commonality in their mission, that is, to prepare couples in as caring a way as possible for marriage. Their expressed concerns reveal a rich array of factors that offers a picture of the very essence of pre-marriage education and demonstrates its importance from the viewpoint of the educators. With that picture of pre-marriage education from the educators' perspective as a backdrop, the next chapter examines the characteristics of the participants and their expectations prior to attending a program.

Chapter 7

The participant couples

The participant couples are the *raison d'etre* for pre-marriage education programs. They form the target audience whose needs, interests and expectations are to be met in the most effective ways possible. The following profile is based on an analysis of the 1,698 respondents (874 females and 824 males) to the pre-program questionnaire.

Demographic characteristics

Most participants (84%) were between 21 and 30 years of *age*. Another 9% were between 31 and 40 years, with small proportions either below 21 (6%) or over 41 (1%). The mean age for females was 24.6 years and for males, 25.9 years. An indication of the representativeness of this group by age can be gauged by comparing the median ages for females and males in this sample with the median ages at first marriage in the Australian population as a whole. In this study, the median age for females was 24.0 years and for males, 25.0 years. The respective national figures are for females 24.5 years and for males 26.7 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1992:1). Given that these PMEP couples at the time of survey were on average still five months from their wedding, this group is comparable in terms of age with couples marrying for the first time in Australia.

One third were in managerial and professional *occupations* (no differences by gender). Almost a third were in clerical occupations (72% females and 28% males), and one tenth in a trade (93% males and 7% females). Two in ten were categorised as semi-skilled or unskilled. The other small proportions were students or unemployed. Figure 4 shows their occupations by gender.

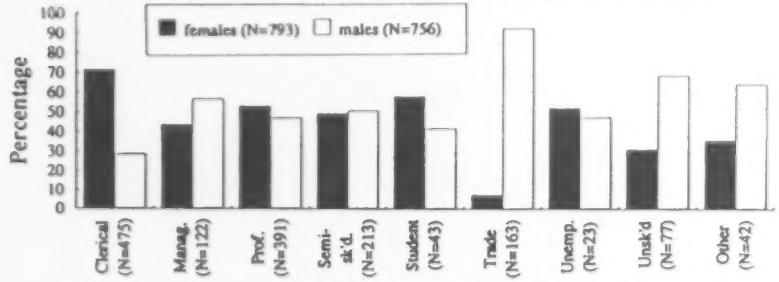

Figure 3: Participants' occupations by gender

By education, one quarter possessed a bachelor's or post-graduate degree and another 8% tertiary diplomas, while just over one third had completed Year 12 or less as their *highest educational level.* The remainder, slightly over one quarter, had trade qualifications and other TAFE certificates. Those holding degrees were evenly divided by gender.

In terms of *gross yearly income,* one fifth were earning $20,000 or less, almost half between $20,000 and $30,000, just over a fifth in the bracket $30,000 to $40,000, and an eighth over $40,000. Two-thirds of those over $30,000 were males. Figure 4 clearly demonstrates the marked gender differences in income.

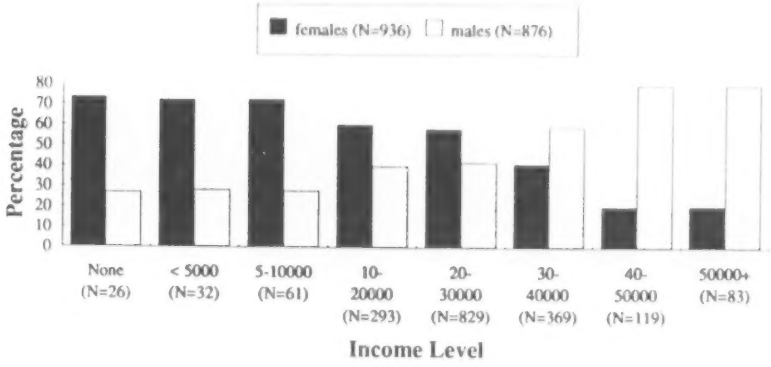

Figure 4: Participants' incomes by gender

By *religion,* 59% described themselves as Catholic and 26% as Anglican. Four percent were Uniting Church, while other religions accounted for only 4%. There were 7% who gave no religion. However, only 21% attended church weekly and 15% monthly (58% of these two groups were female). Almost two-thirds, therefore, seldom or never went to church. This is a key finding of this study, given that all courses were being offered under church auspices and that 98% were planning to be married in a church. It is evident that couples feel that there are strong cultural and traditonal, rather than religious, reasons for being married in a church.

In terms of *birthplace of parents,*59% of participants had fathers and 62% had mothers born in Australia/New Zealand. Approximately one fifth of parents were born in Europe and one tenth in the UK. Among the European countries, Italy was by far the most frequently mentioned birthplace (13%), followed by Malta (3%) and Holland and Germany (1% apiece).

As one would expect on the item relating to *marital status*, the great majority (96%) of participants were single. Divorcees accounted for nearly three percent, and there were even eight respondents who were already married. Despite PMEP literature encouraging couples to attend as early as possible in their relationship, almost all couples were engaged. The mean time before the wedding was 4.9 months, and yet the mean length of time in their current relationship was 38.5 months. PMEPs, it appears, come relatively late in relationships, and people perceive course participation as appropriate after engagement.

After marriage, 93% expect both partners to be employed, and two-thirds intend to live in their own home, flat or unit, with another quarter intending to live in rented accommodation. On the indices of expected employment and intended abode, therefore, these PMEP participants are quite independent. They intend to have 2.9 children (with 5.5% planning at this stage to have five or more children). Only 3% stated they did not plan to have children.

This independent profile is perhaps a reflection of the relative stability of their *home backgrounds*. Only between 12 and 13% of parents had ever divorced and another 6% separated. Twice as many mothers had been widowed (7%) as fathers (3.2%). Moreover, 86% of the respondents claimed that their parents are/were generally happy in their marriage, and 90% said their parents were positive or very positive about their own marriage plans; two-thirds in fact were very positive.

Just under half *live currently* with their parents, and almost one-third live already with their partner. Of the remaining respondents, 12% live with others and 10% live alone (almost three quarters of this latter group being males). Figure 6 depicts the participants current living situation by age group. Fifteen percent of the whole group had lived in a previous relationship without being married.

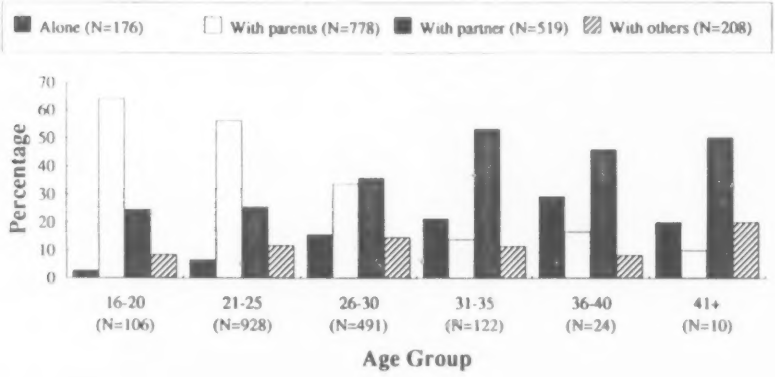

Figure 5: Participants' current living arrrangements by age

The typical PMEP participant

From the data obtained in this survey of almost 1,700 respondents across Australia, it is possible to develop a profile of a typical PMEP participant:

- mid-twenties
- engaged
- single
- known their partner for just over three years
- Australasian-born parents
- planning to live in their own home/flat/unit after the wedding
- Catholic or Anglican
- planning to have 2.9 children
- seldom attends church
- expects both partners to be employed after the wedding
- has an income between $ 20,000 and $30,000
- parents happy in their own marriage
- spread occupationally, but most likely to be in a professional, clerical or semi-skilled occupation
- parents positive, mostly very positive, towards their marriage
- spread educationally, but most likely to have Year 12 or a bachelor's degree as the highest level
- planning their wedding in a church
- currently living with parents or with partner
- participates in a PMEP five months before the wedding
- not lived in a previous relationship

Who suggested they attend a PMEP

When asked who had suggested they attend a PMEP (and they could provide more than one response), most of the participants reported that it had been a minister/priest (86%) or a marriage celebrant (4%). Friends and parents accounted for another 10% each, with only minor proportions saying they had been advised by other people, such as other family or local community groups. Fifteen percent said they had decided together, while another 9% stated that it had been their partner who had made the suggestion and 7% that they had decided by themselves.

What they expected to gain from their PMEP

Table 8 provides a breakdown by gender of what participants expected to gain from attendance at a PMEP (they could respond to more than one item).

Expected gains	Female		Male		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
To learn more about marriage and relationships	537	61.5	477	57.9	1014	59.8
To get assistance in developing a better relationship	460	52.7	381	46.2	841	49.6
To learn more about our relationship	431	49.4	327	39.7	758	44.7
To improve the way we communicate	506	58.0	409	49.6	915	53.9
To learn how to handle differences	483	55.3	385	46.7	868	51.1
To understand my partner better	410	47.0	325	39.4	735	43.3
To help my partner understand me better	380	43.5	289	35.1	669	39.4
To learn more about Christian marriage	239	27.4	193	23.4	432	25.5

Table 8: Participant expected gains by gender.

The most frequently given expected gain was the very general response of learning about marriage and relationships (60%). The more specific skill oriented responses of improving the way they communicated (54%) and learning how to handle differences (51%) followed. A quarter of the respondents cited learning more about Christian marriage as an expectation, a proportion which approximated the figure of those attending church weekly (21%). A cross-tabulation of this expected gain by frequency of church attendance showed a significant trend; of those who expected to learn more about Christian marriage in the program, 46% attended church weekly and 28% monthly, compared with 20% who seldom and only 8% who never attended church.

In every instance, the proportions of females expecting these gains was higher than the proportions of males, and these differences were statistically significant at the .05 level in all but the first general gain of learning about marriage and relationships.

What marriage means to them

The participants were asked at the beginning of their PMEP in the first questionnaire to complete the following statement, "To me, marriage means ...". The wide range of responses form a rich source of comments on contemporary marriage as perceived by these engaged couples. A sampling of just a few of the responses demonstrates the variety of meanings of marriage:

A formal commitment to live together (male)

A formal commitment to loving each other and remaining committed to each other (male)

A secure relationship for life (male)

A special friendship based on love, trust, faith and commitment (female)

A loving relationship between a couple, in which each member can grow, develop and trust (male)

A joint venture (female)

The official commitment before God, my fiancee and myself (male)

A bond never to be broken (male)

An interdependent relationship - two individuals - yet one (male)

A final sealing of our relationship; this is it - for good (male)

A bonding in God's eyes and the eyes of the church - a sacrament (female)

The last step in completing the commitment we have already made to each other (male)

Living together as husband and wife (female)

Everything (female) (a common response)

The predominant paradigm is very clearly one of relationship caring and sharing. Couples continually used such concepts as growing together, love, trust, caring, understanding, togetherness, supporting each other, friendship, intimacy, affection and living for each other. Very few responses explicitly referred to the economic, political or sexual dimensions of marriage. Noticeably lacking in frequency were words like stability, security, sex, power, responsibility, roles, protection and money.

Running through the hundreds of responses are five very common though not discrete themes centred on commitment, companionship in sharing life together, family/children, love between best friends and union under God.

Marriage as commitment/lifelong commitment

Most often this theme was expressed as a lifelong commitment, though frequently such a connotation was not specifically included. There were statements referring to both the legal and loving dimensions of commitment.

> *A legal union of two people in love who want to spend the rest of their lives together* (female)
>
> *The start of our life together, even though we have been together for two years and it has been so good (almost unbelievably good); the legal start for it to get better and better* (female)
>
> *... that our relationship is legal/official, sealed, lasting. Marriage is just the 'rubber stamp' on an ongoing commitment. It is the celebration of our love. The start of a new family* (female)
>
> *Making a public expression of the private commitment we made several years ago. Giving our relationship social validity* (female)
>
> *Formalising our commitment to each other* (female)
>
> *Making a lifelong commitment to my husband that we will be the best of friends for each other always* (female)
>
> *A lifetime commitment on the part of two people...* (female)
>
> *Being totally committed to one other, respecting and wanting what is best for each other* (female)
>
> *A special bond. A lifetime commitment that has no room for divorce* (female)

This was often a female response. One male said,

> *A continuation of a relationship to which I am strongly committed. Although I feel that marriage is unlikely to make a difference to our relationship, my partner feels it will make a final commitment.*

Marriage as a sharing of life together

There were also many references to sharing lives. Sometimes this was couched in terms of growing old together, sometimes of working through the good and bad times together and, in other cases, of sharing responsibilities. Perhaps the most absorbing theme, however, related to the maintenance of individuality in the process of becoming 'one flesh':

> *Having similar goals and striving towards them together yet maintaining our interests individually. Living side by side not sapping your partner's energy. Having your own identity not depending on the other person for it. Having a lifelong companion who lets you be yourself* (female)

> *A sharing of our lives so that we complement each others' strengths and weaknesses* (male)

> *...Our two lives to become one but to still maintain my individuality and he his* (female)

> *The start of a new phase in my life. It means not just considering myself as an entity, but the two of us as one. It also provides a great chance to develop myself to a greater degree while contributing to the growth of another* (male)

> *A lifetime partnership of shared goals, activities, achievements and memories whilst retaining your individuality, with an understanding and acceptance of your partner's shortfalls; and keeping an open line of communication* (female)

Marriage as the place for family/children

Many of the participants' comments referred to children. In fact, for some it almost seemed that this was a prime reason for taking the step of marriage as distinct from remaining in an unmarried relationship. Many couples were concerned that, if they were to have children, then the place to have them was within marriage.

> *It is a firm commitment to the relationship we have built over the years I would not like to have children without some time in a stable marriage so that we can give them the best possible start* (female)

> *It is a means of sharing an ultimate love, a means of bringing children into the world in a loving family* (male)

> *Having the right beginning to bring children into the world* (female)

> *A steady base to bring up children* (male)

Marriage as love and life as best friends

Many of the responses referred to marriage in the context of being together for life with one's best friend. Some examples included:

> *lifelong partnership with your best friend and woman you love* (male)
>
> *Making a life with my best friend* (female)
>
> *Having somebody who is not just your lover but your best friend - able to share joys and sorrows together* (female)

Marriage as a union under God

Another major theme was the reference to marriage being part of God's plan:

> *Sharing my life with my wife to be forever with God* (male)
>
> *Uniting with the person whom God has chosen for me... I see marriage as the will of God* (female)
>
> *Being united under God's eyes, like he is always with us in our hard times and our good times* (female)
>
> *Man and woman joining to become one in spirit with Christ in the centre for guidance in being able to make right decisions. Always working as a team* (female)
>
> *Learning more about each other through the good and bad times, and growing stronger and stronger - without God as our third partner, this would not be humanly possible for me* (female)

These meanings of marriage represent a tapestry of loving expressions. Given the idealism woven into the patterns, and given that they were making these statements at a pre-marriage course, it is perhaps surprising that not more references were made to the caveats, the difficulties and the efforts that would be required to fulfil their dreams. Some couples did indicate that they were under no illusions that marriage as they had defined it was going to require considerable hard work.

> *I consider marriage to be a partnership that has to be worked at all the time* (female)
>
> *I realise that there is a lot of give and take and that marriage is something you have to keep working at it for it to be successful* (male)

The forming of one person from two. We will not necessarily live in complete harmony all our lives, however it is important to work at the relationship and support and protect each others' interests. Marriage is understanding each other, growing together and growing old together (female)

It means a lot of hard work and commitment, but a lot of joy also (female)

There were other respondents who gave answers that have not been categorised above and are worth quoting to illustrate the diversity in meanings attached by these respondents to marriage.

For example, sex was mentioned mainly by men:

loving and caring for each other and having sex... (male)

money and sex (male)

...someone to snuggle up to at night (male)

While money was also not mentioned very often, one woman did draw attention to the expense of travel before marriage:

We would be able to see each other without having to worry about travelling to one another's place - money wise it's less expensive.

Some other answers are a cause for concern in the context of the common meanings given to marriage as already stated. They would seem to indicate legalistic, trite, naive, egocentric, suffocating or overly rose-coloured perceptions of marriage. Examples of such responses include the following:

a piece of paper (male)

Not much (male)

Too personal (male)

I don't know yet (male)

Marriage to me means doubling my happiness and halving my problems (female)

Someone who is always there to listen to me and guide me through troubled times (female)

Loving someone so much that it is exclusive of all other people and that person can satisfy all needs to the extent where this person becomes inseparable to your identity and integral to your existence (male)

It really does involve becoming one flesh. I will no longer be an individual (female)

Marriage is the chance to solidify your feelings and expectations. At this stage my relationship is very up in the air (male)

Aspects of their relationship that please them the most

At the beginning of the program in the first questionnaire, respondents were asked to single out three things about their relationship that please them the most. Despite the emphasis on their relationship in the question, it was interesting to note how many answers applied to only one of the partners. A few examples of this were:

his intelligence

her smile

that my partner loves me despite my negative qualities and characteristics

my partner always encourages me

my partner's very handsome; my partner's good looks

that Simon is equal in all the household chores, and he is non-sexist

Other examples, either of the egocentric or the other-centred kind, are included in the categories given below.

Most respondents, however, were able to give answers that described a characteristic or a quality that they believed was present in their relationship. A study of these answers presents a picture of the many and various ways in which the couples in this survey saw the strengths in their relationships prior to participating in a PMEP. There was a considerable commonality in their responses, despite the diversity in the characteristics of the couples themselves. The following key terms were frequently given, and sample expressions from the couples have been clustered alongside them. These expressions provide insight into how couples actually articulate these sometimes cliche-ridden and hard-to-define concepts.

Just as the layers of skin of an onion are peeled to reveal the heart of the vegetable, so the layers of meaning surrounding each of the key concepts below can be examined to approach closer to the essence of a relationship, as seen through the eyes of these engaged couples. The concepts may well still be largely indefinable, but the layers of meaning can progressively lead to a

deeper and clearer understanding - albeit only an approximation - of what it feels like to be on the threshold of marriage. Incidentally, both activities - peeling onion layers and examining relationship meanings - have the potential to bring tears to the eyes!

trust: *partner's loyalty; we take each other seriously and respect each other; having someone you can depend upon; fidelity; reliability; that I am able to trust and be open completely; our honesty with each other; we both believe our relationship is important; he has made me pull down the wall that I have built to protect myself from being hurt; the trust we put in each other;*

love: *being loved by my partner and having a partner to care for; commitment; being content; how loved we both feel; his warm hug when I need it; our positive attitude to each other; mutual desire for its [the relationship's] continuance; the unconditional love my partner constantly expresses; he loves me the way I am, he is always there for me through good times and bad; it's wonderful to love someone and know that it is returned;*

communication: *ease in talking; our ability to handle differences; our ability to communicate with each other; conversation; we talk freely about our feelings; our ability to solve problems; the relaxed atmosphere in which we communicate; respect for one another's opinion; spontaneity; understanding; openness; being able to confide in a partner; frankness; sharing and honesty; that we are not shy/ashamed to speak deeply; our acknowledgement of each other's feelings; praying together;*

compatibility: *same outlook on life; common interests; similar goals/ambitions; sharing the same religious beliefs; our common values and morals; our Christianity shared; Mary likes fishing; holidays together; we don't fight much; 'at-homeness'; natural feeling of comfort and unison; that my partner's personality is mostly compatible with mine;*

companionship: *being together; being treated as an equal in all respects; spending lots of time together; our ability to totally relax with each other; the equality we have within the relationship; support; togetherness; belonging; 'relaxedness'; we are stronger as a couple; we complement each other; having someone who sticks by me; the way we do household chores together; we are there for each other when it counts; sharing and enjoying each other's company; that when we spend time together, it is quality time;*

friendship: *we are best friends* (a common response); *a huggable friend; being the best of friends is so great; we are the bestest of friends; that we are both each other's best friend;*

intimacy: *sex; feeling close; someone to share feelings with; having that "closeness"; physical intimacy, not especially sex; tenderness; lovemaking and sense of fulfilment; warmth and cuddles; he's very affectionate;*

humour: *jokes; similar sense of humour; fun; the way we can laugh together; laughing a lot; spunk; he makes me laugh; having a good time;*

caring: *considerate and unselfish; inner beauty; generosity and sensitivity; warmth; thoughtfulness; he always makes me feel special; the support he gives me; her confidence in me; the joy of caring for someone; the way my partner makes me feel good about myself; encouraging each other; the way that each of us considers the other person;*

security: *the emotional and financial security; financial stability; feelings of safety; feeling of security but no pressure; I really feel wanted and loved, I know I'll always be looked after and happy, I'll never feel alone; sense of protectiveness;*

space: *the freedom to be myself; space to do our own thing; that I am free to be myself and that my partner is free to be herself; ability to accept partner's personal interests; the way we can still do our own thing and we're not glued together.*

There were a few responses that are a cause for concern; examples were:

question [is] way too personal for me
At this stage nothing
we both agree and disagree on the same things, we are a perfect match

While the question was intended to explore couples' ideas on already existing ingredients in their relationship, there were also a few responses that indicated a recognition of the potential for growth:

our ideas of continuing into beautiful love
our relationship is always growing - growing closer to each other
trying to be a better and more considerate person
challenging - trying to improve it [the relationship].

This theme is taken up more fully in the next section of this chapter.

Aspects about their relationship that they would like to develop further

Finally, the respondents were asked to describe three aspects about their relationship that they would like to develop further. Since this question was being asked just prior to the couples undergoing their PMEP, it was thought important to capture a snapshot of the relationship areas that they themselves believed required further development. From an educational perspective, these responses help to furnish a general analysis of couple needs as they begin the journey through pre-marriage programs.

A very high proportion of responses focused on **improving communication**. Some typical examples on communication were:

to understand each other better; more understanding of my partner's thoughts; think before we speak; listening to each other; deeper personal discussions; be less self-centred if a problem arises; respect for each other's feelings; problem-solving; to get my partner to bring out her secrets; equality in decision-making; me opening up a bit more; more open feelings; my ability to talk freely to him; being able to let my partner know when there is something wrong; to openly say what we like and dislike about each other and not hold it in.

A second category of very frequent answers was **handling conflict.** Examples of responses relating to conflict resolution were the following:

working out problems; not to fight so much; resolving disputes/arguments; our tolerance of each other's darker moods; I would like him to live a little more, rather than worry. We must be able to understand each other a lot more, stop our short tempers; being able to handle disappointments and criticism; our stubborn attitudes; to talk about our disagreements rather than ignore them; argue less; acceptance of annoying habits and mannerisms; not fighting over nothing; to be able to say sorry when it's your fault; learn how to fight better; building each other up instead of saying negative things; how to reduce negative reactions/feelings to words spoken/misunderstood; stopping the silly fights.

In another cluster of responses were several themes which were mentioned less often than the two already given but were still very prevalent. These included:

dealing with others: *how to deal with others, ie: parents; getting on with parents/ parents-in-law; better understanding of parents; clearer understanding of different cultures of families (parents);*

affection/intimacy: *improve affection; intimacy; the balance of how to show affection; more tenderness; communication of needs for intimacy - when and in what way most preferred;*

spirituality: *involving more religion in our relationship; our spiritual relationship; our Christianity together; pray and read the Bible together more; my partner's understanding of my religion; our prayer life together;*

serving one's partner: *empathy towards each other; how to serve my partner better; being less selfish; I need to be more understanding; more mutual respect for each other's needs;*

sexual relationship: *sex; our sexuality together; physical relationship; intimacy of a sexual nature;*

finance: *our financial understanding; financial planning; financial security; my financial status; improved budgeting;*

leisure: *greater participation in sports/activities together; our interests in each other's leisure activities; develop more opportunities for us to enjoy our leisure time together; fishing;*

household roles: *a shared interest in housework; that he does his own laundry; his cooking skills, his cleaning skills; sharing household tasks;*

individuality/interdependence: *develop individuality as well as be a couple; understanding each other's individuality;*

some others: *trust; sense of security; friendship; love; ability to do 'nothing' together; decrease in self-doubt that we both sometimes feel; give up smoking; talk further about raising children; parenting; husband and wife relationship after marriage; sharing mutual friends.*

Again, several comments signalled warning lights in that they can be interpreted as unrealistic, not acknowledging any room for growth or not demonstrating any appreciation of a relationship as a dynamic and ever-moving entity. Examples of such comments were:

not sure, not certain (stated many times)

unsure, will find out as time goes by (female)

nothing, everything is just about developed. Oh, except our children (male)

nothing, in a word perfect (male)

none, but sex (male)

nothing really (male)

nothing - we'll let time look after that (female)

nothing really, everything is fine (male)

I am really happy with the way our relationship is (female)

she can be a nag, I've got a quick temper (male)

her to be a bit brighter (male)

ask me this in three months (male)

all of it (female)

There is again in this classification an interesting mix of 'I' and 'you' statements, which reveal much about the values of the particular respondents and about the assumptions underlying their views of a relationship. The other point to note from an educational perspective about these responses on areas they perceive as requiring further development is the high degree of overlap between these articulated participant needs and the PMEPs' stated intentions and topics (see Chapter 5). The categories above also closely reflect the areas addressed in such instruments as PREPARE and FOCCUS.

This chapter has analysed the characteristics of the couples who participated in PMEPs around Australia during January to March 1992. As well as the demographic characteristics, this chapter has examined how they came to be attending a program, what they expected to gain from it, what meanings they attached to marriage and their relationship, and what aspects in their relationship they judged as the most pleasing and as requiring further development. Considerable use has been made of quotations in order to allow the human voices of the participants to speak for themselves. From this profile has been obtained a relatively clear picture of couples who participate in PMEPs and of the range of their ideas, prejudices, hopes, fears and expectations. Together with the complementary pictures already developed on the programs themselves (Chapter 5) and the educators (Chapter 6), the backdrop to the experiences of both participants and educators in these programs has now been sketched, and the focus now turns to the analysis of these experiences.

Chapter 8

The experience of pre-marriage education programs

This chapter contains information collected from couples about their perceptions of the organisation of the programs, their satisfaction with the experiences of the programs and how helpful they found the topics covered and their accompanying learning activities. The couples' overall measures of satisfaction with the program are then explored with particular emphasis on the extent to which the programs realised their expectations and how they might recommend the program to others in the future. A survey of the educators' perceptions of the organisation, content and processes of the PMEPs has been added in order to compare their experiences with those of the couples.

Satisfaction with the PMEPs' organisation

Couples were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with a number of organisational aspects of the PMEPs they attended using a five point scale to grade the strength their reactions. Their responses are detailed in Table 9.

(In this and subsequent tables, the first number is the percentage and the numbers in brackets equal the number of respondents.)

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Amount of pre prog. information received	16. (204)	46.2 (575)	30.1(375)	5.2 (65)	2.0 (25)
Adequacy of pre-program information	16.2(207)	46.8 (598)	28.1(359)	6.9 (88)	2.0 (26)
Amnt of fees charged	10.6(140)	37.6 (496)	32.7(431)	14.6 (193)	4.4 (58)

Venue	27.3 (362)	5.8 (741)	11.4 (152)	4.3 (57)	1.2 (16)
The referral process	11.4 (143)	49.2 (618)	32 (401)	4.6 (58)	2.8 (35)
Length of program	12.7 (169)	55.3 (734)	19.7(261)	10.5 (140)	1.8 (24)
Timetabling of the program	15.4 (204)	57.8 (767)	19.2 (254)	6.4 (85)	1.2 (16)
Arrangements for post program follow up	10.3 (118)	43.6 (498)	42.7 (487)	2.6 (30)	0.7 (8)

Table 9: Couples' satisfaction with organisation.

Two thirds of the couples indicated that they were satisfied with the amount and type of pre-program information they received. There were some suggestions that more information about the program would have been helpful in order to allay some of the fears they felt about their attendance:

> *More info re program to go out before the course. Very few couples knew what to expect and the feeling has been 'well we had to go to it' and we were a bit suspicious of the content.* (female)

> *More people would be attracted to the program if they felt comfortable or were told they would not have religion forced on them. Some people may have initially been scared by this prospect* (male)

> *I found the first week a bit daunting perhaps due to a lack of knowledge regarding the course and my own expectations* (female)

The amount of fees charged for the programs was a point of concern for about one fifth of the couples. Typical comments from some included:

> *The cost is far too high, especially having just built a house* (male)

> *The cost is excessive especially when leading up to a marriage. There are many other expenses to think about as well. If the cost was decreased more couples would attend* (female)

> *More government funding - we are all on tight budgets at this time in our lives and this is a very beneficial course which all engaged couples should experience* (female)

The referral process was approved by only 60% of couples indicating that there still remains a sense of constraint to attend programs. The following comments reinforce this view:

Not so much pressure by marrying priests to attend course (female)

Make sure the people who introduce us to these courses emphasise that it is NOT a religious course (female)

Before recommendation to a course, look at the individuals and their relationship - a course for everyone no matter what seems a little like grouping everyone under one title to be married' without considering their individuality (female)

The timetabling and length of the programs were problematic issues. For each comment suggesting the program was too long, there was another suggesting that it could be lengthened because 'things were too rushed':

A whole weekend is difficult to give up on a farm (female)

The course was a little too long and by the end of the day and tiredness sets in its difficult to take everything in and concentrate (male)

Shorter sessions - very long after a full day at work (female)

Four half days instead of two full days (female)

It was too short - we were frequently running out of time for deeper discussion (male)

The course may have been reduced to an evening and a day - or an equal amount of time. Although 'ice breaking' activities were relevant.... we may have gained some time if the first morning session had been shortened (male)

Total scores for level of satisfaction with the organisation of the programs were calculated. The total possible score was 40, and with the mean being 28.30 (standard deviation = 5.06).

Scores were cross-tabulated against four characteristics of the couples which appeared from anecdotal evidence to have been significant in this context, namely age, gender, length of relationship and current living arrangements. The calculations revealed in this part of the survey revealed no significant relationship between satisfaction with the organisation of the programs with gender, length of their relationship or current living arrangements. The age of the participants was significant (see Appendix G for statistical analysis). These data indicate that the *younger the couples*, the more likely they were to express *dissatisfaction with the organisation* of the programs - that is *age correlated positively with satisfaction with the organisation of the programs.*

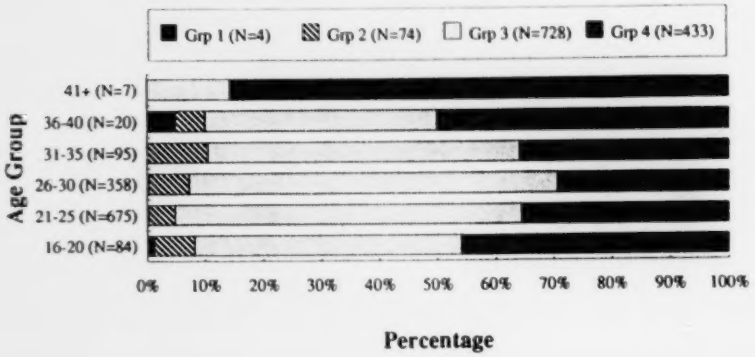

Figure 6: Couples' satisfaction with organisation by age

Satisfaction with the PMEPs' structure and experiences

Couples were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the experiences of the programs along a number of dimensions. The summary of these data is given in Table 11.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Way program was structured	24.9 (331)	62.4 (830)	9.2 (122)	3.1(41)	0.5 (6)
Amount of time for discussion with my partner	26.1 (347)	54.1 (719)	10.2 (135)	8.7 (116)	0.8 (11)
Amount of time for group discussion	19.1 (250)	58.1 (759)	15.9 (208)	6.0 (48)	0.8 (11)
My involvement in activities	19.2 (255)	63.1 (837)	15.8 (210)	1.5 (20)	0.3 (4)
Length of sessions	15.2 (203)	62.7 (831)	14.4 (191)	6.6 (88)	0.8 (11)
Opportunity to ask questions of my own	25.1 (332)	57.3 (758)	14.1 (187)	3.2 (43)	0.3 (4)
My interest in the sessions	24 (319)	58.7(779)	14.3 (190)	2.3 (30)	0..8 (10)
Educator's style	46.4 (616)	41.5 (551)	8.6 (114)	2.9 (38)	0.6 (8)

Educator's answers to my questions	38.8 (498)	47 (603)	11.9 (152)	1.8 (23)	0.5 (6)
Feeling comfortable with the session content	33.9 (451)	54.8 (728)	8 (116)	2 (26)	0.5 (7)
Use of stories /humour/ (examples by educator	46.5 (617)	43.3 (575)	8.5 (113)	1.1 (14)	0.6
Information provided in the topics	32.5 (431)	55 (743)	9 (119)	2 (27)	0.6 (8)
Challenging experiences	18.8 (246)	53.1 (694)	23.7 (309)	3.4 (44)	1 (13)
Relevance of information to me personally	27.4 (363)	53.9 (714)	14 (186)	3.3 (44)	1.4 (18)
Relevance of information to my relationship	34.1 (453)	50.8 (675)	11.5 (153)	2.5 (33)	1.1 (14)

Table 11: Couples' satisfaction with program experiences

There were very high levels of satisfaction expressed about this aspect of PMEPs by more than three quarters of all couples. The remaining quarter of couples were not wholly dissatisfied. Approximately 20% of this remaining group tended to be people who described themselves as being neutral, that is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The aspects of the program which seemed to generate the most dissatisfaction were the amount of time allowed for discussion with partner, group discussion and the length of the sessions. The first of these two featured in many of the couples' comments about the changes they would like to see to the programs. Some examples include:

> *More discussion time between partners during the actual course time* (male)
>
> *More time to discuss topics with other couples and with the entire group. Sharing ideas is always worthwhile* (female)
>
> *More group discussion against mostly lecturing - I feel more can be learnt through each other's experiences...* (female)
>
> *Less time on talk and more time allowed for couples to discuss issues* (male)
>
> *Get couples as a group to discuss more together* (male)

> *Consider giving more time to the area where couples spend time discussing. Sometimes we really needed more time to discuss fully our feeling* (female)

As mentioned previously, some thought the sessions were too long, others, that they were too short :

> *Some sessions were too short - just as you are getting into them you are pulled up to move onto the next topic* (male)

> *The sessions were far too long* (male)

> *Longer sessions so that there is more time for individual couples to discuss their feelings / thoughts on each topic* (female)

> *I thought some of the topics were a bit dragged out* (female)

There were also some comments from couples relating to the overall structure of the program:

> *Subject content was excellent but the course was a little unstructured, and one session didn't lead to another - a little disjointed* (male)

> *Need a timetable* (male)

This ambivalence with regard to the length of sessions and value placed on different parts by different couples reveals the diversity in learning styles which educators need to consider when planning their programs.

Calculation of the total scores for the couples' satisfaction with the experiences of the programs gave a mean value of 60.72 out of a possible high score of 75 (standard deviation = 8.1).

Further analysis of the data was undertaken to cross-tabulate these scores with the four couple characteristics mentioned previously (see Appendix G for calculations). The length of the couples' relationship and their living arrangements did not appear to be a factor in their overall rating of the experiences of the program nor did the gender of individual respondents. The only significant correlation indicated that the dissatisfaction with the structure of the programs was reported by older rather than younger couples.

The following figure shows the levels of satisfaction of various age groups with the experiences of the program.

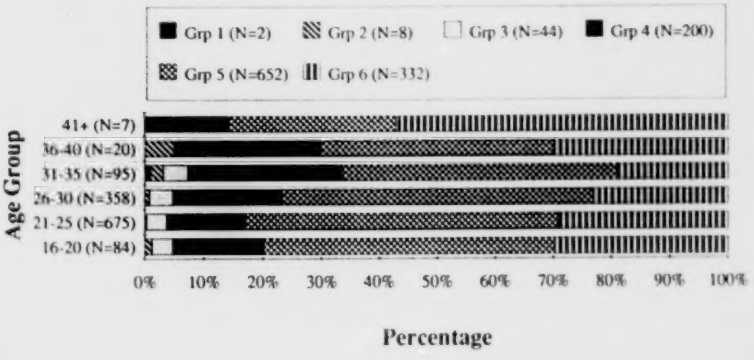

Figure 7: Couples' satisfaction with program experiences by age.

Helpfulness of topics

Having established some indication of the couples' satisfaction with the overall experiences of the program, attention is now turned to how helpful the couples perceived the content and processes used in PMEPs to be for their relationship. These data were collected using a five point Likert scale and total scores for each were calculated. Helpfulness of topics is reported in Table 13 and helpfulness of activities in Table 15.

	Very Helpful	Helpful	Neutral	Unhelpful	Very Unhelpful
Family of origin	20.5 (254)	48.2 (597)	27.6 (342)	.4 (42)	0.3 (4)
Finance / Budgeting	20 (242)	43.6 (527)	28.8 (348)	6.4 (77)	1.2 (14)
Marital roles	20.4 (262)	57.3 (736)	20.1 (258)	1.9 (24)	0.3 (4)
Expectations of marriage	29.7 (389)	56.4 (738)	12.2 (160)	1.5 (19)	0.2 (3)
Sexuality	25.4(321)	49.4(626)	21.2 (268)	2.6 (33)	1.4 (18)
Communication	47 (624)	43.4 (577)	8.8 (117)	0.5 (6)	0.3 (4)
Family Planning	23.4 (285)	43.7 (531)	27.5 (335)	3.8 (46)	1.6 (19)
Christian marriage	16.5 (197)	42.9 (511)	35.2 (420)	3.9 (46)	1.5 (18)

Coping with change	18.1 (230)	59.3 (752)	20.1 (255)	2 (25)	0.5 (6)
Conflict Resolution	38.7 (510)	49.1 (646)	10.6 (140)	1.4 (19)	0.2 (2)
Aspects of personality	20.4 (259)	57 (723)	20.8 (264)	1.4 (18)	0.3 (4)
Spirituality	13.1 (154)	39.8 (467)	40.3 (473)	4.9 (58)	1.9 (22)
Legal aspects of marriage	12.2 (128)	34.8 (366)	42.2 (444)	7.6 (80)	3.2 (34)
Stress management	14.3 (157)	39.3 (430)	38.4 (420)	6 (66)	2 (22)

Table 13: Couples' perceived levels of helpfulness of topics to their relationship

The most outstanding feature of Table 13 is the helpfulness that couples assign to topics on communication and conflict resolution. In addition, topics such as marital roles and expectations, coping with change and dealing with aspects of personality were all rated as being helpful or very helpful by nearly three quarters of the couples. It is also interesting to note the lower levels of helpfulness given to topics such as spirituality, Christian marriage and family planning. While this may not be surprising, given the lack of affiliation with the churches reported by the couples (see chapter 7), these topics were the subject of several respondents' strong comments :

> *I would like to see more Christian ideas put into the program as I am a Christian and would have liked to know more about being in a Christian marriage* (female)
>
> *Less discussion of religion, or else make religious discussion more interesting and relevant* (male)
>
> *Less religion ie NONE. Less emphasis on natural family planning method* (male)
>
> *I would like to see the emphasis on religion changed. For people who weren't strong church goers it was a bit of a turn off when there was a strong referral to religion* (female)
>
> *This program is a program for couples who intend to be married in the Catholic church. I feel that a much greater emphasis should be placed on the reasons for doing this. Otherwise the program may well be run by anyone for any type of couple* (female)
>
> *Family planning not really relevant for a 25 year old who has done most of her own research and found what is right for her and the couple has already discussed* (female)

I would like to see the inclusion of other family planning methods such as contraceptive devices so that people may make informed decisions (male)

Birth control would have been good (female)

Sessions focusing on other issues such as decision making, forgiveness, the nature of marriage, children, parenting roles, building self esteem, where covered, were also valued by the couples. Just under half of respondents mentioned that spirituality, legal aspects of marriage and stress management were not covered in the programs they attended.

The figure for some topics that received a relatively high percentage of ratings for the neutral category (neither helpful nor unhelpful) should be treated with some caution as they can indicate either neutral feelings or that the topic was not covered in the program as detailed in Chapter 5.

Calculations of total scores of helpfulness of the topics gave a mean score of 50.5 out of a maximum total of 70 (standard deviation = 10.2). Cross-tabulations of these scores with age, gender, current living arrangements and length of their relationship showed that, allowing that most found the topics helpful, those who expressed dissatisfaction were more likely to be already *living with their partner* (see Appendix G). These findings are illustrated by a number of comments given by these couples:

Perhaps some courses need to be specifically geared towards older couples - perhaps leading to a shorter course - seemed to cover a lot of ground already considered (female)

When partners are living together I believe this needs to be taken into consideration. I believe this would have made a difference in what myself and partner gained from this course (female)

As most of the couples attending already live together for a fair amount of time most of them have already faced up to the major problems involved in a relationship and would not be considering marriage if they had not negotiated and found what works best for them, therefore I feel the course was boring and uninformative (male)

Too much discussion on matters which were not relevant for us as we have been going together for six years - although may have been relevant to others. Separate courses for advanced and beginners (male)

Helpfulness of activities

The following table shows how couples ranked the helpfulness of activities used in the PMEP they attended.

	Very Helpful	Helpful	Neutral	Unhelpful	Very Unhelpful
Lectures / talks	25 (330)	61.9 (817)	11.8 (156)	0.9 (12)	0.3 (4)
Role plays	16.4 (177)	54.2 (585)	25.9 (279)	2.7 (29)	0.8 (9)
Interaction with your partner	37.5 (496)	54 (715)	7.7 (8)	0.6 (8)	0.2 (2)
Interaction with other couples	19.7 (253)	54.6 (701)	22.1 (284)	2.8 (36)	0.7 (9)
Small group work	18.4 (219)	55.7 (664)	21.9 (261)	3.2 (38)	0.9 (11)
Large group work	16 (194)	54.3 (659)	25.5 (310)	3.4 (41)	0.8 (10)
Guest speakers	34 (327)	49 (472)	15.2 (146)	1 (10)	0.8 (8)
Exercise sheets / workbooks	26.1 (336)	56.9 (733)	14.4 (186)	2 (26)	0.5 (6)
Overhead transparencies	17.6 (190)	53.8 (582)	23.7 (256)	3.7 (40)	1.3 (14)
Videos	21.4 (134)	46.6 (291)	23.8 (149)	5 (31)	3.2 (14)

Table 15: Couples' perceived levels of helpfulness of activities to their relationship

This information needs to be interpreted with some caution. It became apparent during analysis of the information from the questionnaires, that some couples had some difficulty identifying the actual processes in which they had participated. A number of respondents indicated they used the inventories PREPARE and FOCCUS as part of their PMEP when, according to the mapping survey, these inventories had not been used in the program the couples had attended. Hence, due to their unreliability, these data have been omitted from Table 15.

There is clear evidence that couples ascribe a high value to the time given to interacting with each other during the program, and the use of workbooks and exercises. Respondents reported that they found some other activities helpful, including games, prayer services, case studies and story telling .

Couples also made a variety of comments about ways in which they thought this aspect of the programs might be changed. One cluster of comments revolved around the issue of adding some variety to the types of activities used:

> *Alternative activities. We talked and answered questions and then discussed them 90% of the time. Could use videos, group discussions to change this* (male)

> *I feel a slight variation to the 'presentation - question - answer' approach should be instituted. The format as such was satisfactory and beneficial, but the repetition was overwhelming, just one or two sessions difference would break it up nicely* (female)

Another set of comments centred on the need for programs to contain more interactive processes:

> *More group discussions against mostly lecturing - I feel that more can be learnt through each others' experiences with the lecturer using the examples given from the group rather than their own - helps us to relate more and keep more involved* (female)

> *More input from the class* (male)

> *Rely too much on lecture style presentation and not enough interaction between leaders and participants* (female)

> *Less teacher - centred, more couple interaction* (male)

Couples also suggested more use of videos and films and more 'hands on' activities such as role plays.

Other respondents also reported some discomfort with the processes used in the programs they attended:

> *There was one exercise where we were asked to discuss a real problem in our relationship while another couple watched. I felt an infringement on our privacy and intimacy. This lead us to discuss a very minor problem which we didn't feel comfortable doing anyway* (male)

> *Personally I dislike the small group discussions - I feel compelled to say something and usually this was what I felt was private between my partner and me. I felt I closed up at these times* (female)

> *Asked very personal questions which I was not prepared to discuss* (female)

There were also suggestions that it may be useful for some couples if some time was made available for them to consult with a counsellor as part of the PMEP:

> *Time for individuals to speak to a trained person privately about issues they don't feel they would like to bring up in front of the whole group. I mean, this stuff brings things up* (female)

The gender of presenters was an issue for the some of the male participants:

> *Being male it was different with no male input. Especially in the sexual area, male input would be appreciated for both genders*

> *A man's perspective would be useful (O.K. so now you know I'm male!) That is, having a male who is as knowledgeable and skilled as the two female presenters would be beneficial*

A number of female respondents concurred with these sentiments:

> *It would be great to see some more male input. It was good, but I think it would be better if there was a male involved especially in the area of sexuality.*

The use of guest speakers during the programs received some comment from the participants. While some appreciated the variety that this strategy added to the programs and valued the information gained from such sessions, where speakers appeared to present a biased or irrelevant view of a topic, they were harshly dealt with in the couples' comments:

> *The guest speaker was very biased and therefore probably had a negative effect. The use of 'scare tactics'... was quite unprofessional* (female)

> *(the guest speaker) should have known better than to use guilt as a motivator. ...I found the sexist views expressed to be quite disturbing* (female)

> *I felt like I was being preached at and being told how to* (female)

Calculations of total scores on the helpfulness of the activities for the couples' relationships gave a mean value of 38.2 out of a maximum value of 65 (Standard deviation = 8.91). These scores were cross-tabulated with respondents' age, gender, current living arrangements and length of their relationship. Once again, *older respondents* were more likely to be dissatisfied with the activities and the longer couples had been in their relationship, the more likely they were to rate the activities as being unhelpful (see Appendix G). Figure 8 charts couples' perceived levels of helpfulness of activities by relationship length.

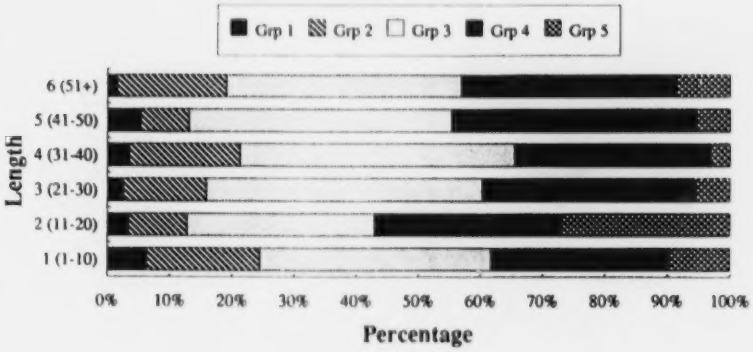

Figure 8: Couples' perceived levels of helpfulness of activities by relationship length

Satisfaction with the overall quality of PMEPs

The couples' reports of high levels of satisfaction with the PMEPs are confirmed by couples' responses to questions relating to their overall rating of the courses' quality and their preparedness to recommend them. These results are represented diagrammatically as follows:

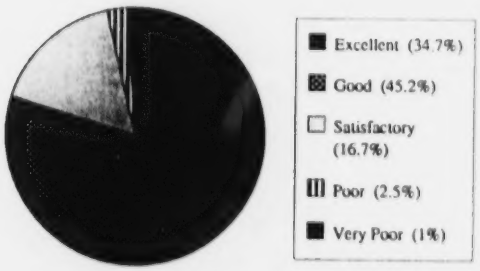

Figure 9: Overall rating of quality of PMEPs (percentage)

Figure 10: Strength of recommendation of program to other couples (percentage)

Comments from some of the respondents support these data:

> *It was very well done in the time allocated* (female)
>
> *The program was very worthwhile* (male)
>
> *I was very satisfied with the program* (male)
>
> *I thoroughly enjoyed the program and would recommend it to any engaged couple* (female)
>
> *Keep it up - it's worth it* (male)
>
> *I found the program to be of good quality, helpful and enjoyable. Although I was directed to come I would recommend it to others* (female)
>
> *A good program to cover a wide variety of people and a wide variety of subjects* (male)

Some other comments received from couples illustrate the variety of ways in which they saw their PMEPs as being helpful:

> *If you allow it to - it can help you with your relationship* (female)

We would recommend the pre marriage seminar to anyone considering marriage as it was a valuable experience for us. Our communication has really opened up (female)

We weren't allowed to marry in the church unless we did it. But the course was interesting and well run - a credit to the convenors (male)

It is not that I felt the course (was) totally useless, but rather we as a couple had previously dealt with a lot of the issues raised. So the course may not have been helpful for us, but that doesn't make it a totally useless course. (female)

The program opened my eyes to things I'd never thought that much about before. It made me think more of my partner and less of myself. It made me appreciate what our future will be (female)

It is quite difficult after four months, a wedding and a honeymoon to remember specific things learned at the program, but I do remember I learned a lot and gained a lot from specific speakers. It was a good opportunity for us to set time aside to talk about our relationship (female)

I feel much of the material was directed at much younger people than myself and my partner; we have both lived away from home for ten years and had been living together for a year prior to attending the course. Much of the material consequently seemed to be stating the bleeding obvious (male)

A great course for all to do - not all may be relevant but you learn from the bits that are (female)

Some areas of our relationship needed work. My spouse and I had been apart for nine months due to my work commitments and on getting together again, some things were understandably strained. The marriage course reminded us of what we meant to each other and now that we are a happily married couple with distinct plans for the future based on what we learned in the course (male)

Educators' perceptions of their programs

In order to gain a second perspective of the PMEPs, educators were asked to give their perceptions of the programs they had led. Educators were asked to rate with their satisfaction with the organisation, content and processes of their programs and to give their ideas on what they perceived to be the most important outcomes for the couples.

Educators' satisfaction with the organisation of the programs

Educators were asked to give their perceptions of the organisation of the programs they had lead using the same scale which the couples had used. Their responses are given in Table 18.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Amount of pre program contact received	21.5 (34)	44.9 (71)	22.8 (36)	3.2 (5)	0 (0)
Adequacy of pre program information	24.7 (39)	46.2 (72)	18.3 (29)	5.1 (8)	0 (0)
Amount of fees charged	28.3 (45)	48.1 (76)	15.2 (24)	3.8 (6)	1 (1)
Location of course	43 (68)	42.4 (67)	3.8 (6)	8.2 (13)	1 (1)
Referral process	11.4 (18)	43 (68)	22.8 (36)	13.9 (22)	1 (2)
Length of program	18.4 (29)	60.1 (95)	7.6 (12)	10.1 (16)	1 (2)
Timetabling of program	33.5 (53)	51.9 (82)	6.7 (11)	4.4 (7)	0 (0)
Arrangements for post program follow up	10.6 (17)	32.3 (51)	24.7 (39)	12 (19)	1 (1)

Table 18: Educators' satisfaction with the organisation of PMEPs

Educators in general appeared to be satisfied with most aspects of the organisation of their programs. As with the couples, however, there were some concerns expressed with the adequacy of the pre-program contact and information given to couples and the way couples were referred to them:

> *Better communication between church ministers and the couples about the course content and the the skills they [the couples] might gain.*
>
> *I would like to see the priests better educated about what goes on at the courses and hence be able to 'sell' the courses rather than force the couples to go.*
>
> *I would like to see a better referral system so that couples come with a better knowledge of what to expect at a program and therefore a more postive and open attitude. I would like to see some pre-program information to reinforce this.*

Educators also expressed some concern with the **length** of the programs:

> *The time frame of this program means the course is very pressured. The material is good...however 10 hours is inadequate in the extreme*
>
> *I feel our [program] could be somewhat shorter and some of the sessions combined. It lead to excessive tiredness and I think it lessens their [the couples'] capacity to participate*
>
> *I would like to see the course being made longer because we always seem to have to cut across the couples talking to each other (but realistically I think we can only have the courses as long as they are at present)*

The frustration of many educators with regard to the length of the PMEPs they lead is very eloquently summed up in the following comment:

> *Time is a big problem and yet the nature of the couples we have means that we are unable to increase the time commitment without creating very negative reactions from couples already forced to attend. This time constraint affects everything we do and is a constant source of frustration.*

It is also interesting to note the high level of neutrality (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) with the arrangements to follow up couples after their wedding. These feelings seem to be largely attributed to the lack of resources avaliable to agencies and groups to do this:

> *Some non-threatening facility available for couples in the early stages of their marriage to consult with the educator to affirm or reiterate previously covered PME material. Currently there are scattered post-marriage courses but we need a more adequate post marriage program to meet couples' needs when the situation arises.*

Educators' satisfaction with topics covered

Educators were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the content of the programs they had lead. Most rated their satisfaction with the topics highly.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Family of origin	7.3 (59)	36.7 (58)	7.6 (12)	1.9 (3)	0 (0)
Finance / Budgeting	13.9 (22)	29.7 (47)	17.7 (28)	6.7 (11)	1 (1)
Marital roles	25.3 (40)	46.8 (74)	12.0 (19)	1.3 (2)	0 (0)
Expectations of marriage	39.2 (62)	41.1 (65)	7.6 (12)	2.0 (3)	0 (0)
Sexuality	33.5 (53)	34.8 (55)	12.0 (19)	2.5 (4)	1 (1)
Communication	43.7 (69)	44.9 (71)	3.2 (5)	1.0 (1)	0 (0)
Family Planning	21.5 (34)	29.1 (46)	11.4 (18)	3.4 (6)	1 (1)
Christian marriage	33.5 (53)	21.5 (34	8.9 (14)	9.5 (15)	1.3 (2)
Coping with change	13.9 (22)	35.4 (56)	18.4 (29)	5.7 (9	1 (1)
Conflict Resolution	32.3 (51)	48.7 (77)	7.0 (11)	1.3 (2)	0 (0)
Aspects of personality	10.1 (16)	33.5 (53)	20.2 (32)	3.2 (5)	0 (0)
Spirituality	21.5 (34)	22.8 (36)	13.3 (21)	16.6 (17)	0 (0)
Legal aspects of marriage	3.8 (6)	9.5 (15)	17.7 (28)	3.4 (6)	2.5 (4)
Stress management	1.9 (3)	18.3 (29)	17.7 (28)	5.1 (8)	1.2 (3)

Table 19: Educators' satisfaction with topics covered in PMEPs

A number of educators questioned the relevance for the couples of certain topics:

> *A changing emphasis on the budgeting program to a greater appreciation that the majority have been living together for some time - more info on the legal aspects of marriage*

> *Finance topic needs to be related to the goals of the participants rather than a standard format every program.*

> *Sexuality needs to be more specific and not beating about the bush*

> *The spirituality session could be more dynamic. Church's teaching needs to be made more relevant to where the couples are*

The sexuality session is too limited in terms of information and raising issues

Some educators recommended adding topics or deleting parts of existing topics:

A rationalisation of material for each session - at the moment (there is) too much, giving the impression of rushing somewhat.

The inclusion of finance and budgeting and coping with change

I feel the communication session was a bit lengthy and could be made more concise

Overall, educators were very satisfied with the content of their programs but like the couples they wanted changes in some of the activities and processes.

Educators' satisfaction with processes used

Data for the educators' levels of satisfaction with processes used in the PMEPs are presented in Table 20.

	Very Satisified	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisified
Lectures / talks	21.1 (34)	63.3 (100)	10 (6.3)	2.5 (4)	0 (0)
Role plays	15.8 (25)	24.4 (37)	13.4 (22)	3.4 (6)	1 (1)
PREPARE	1.9 (3)	1.9 (23)	1.9 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Interaction between individual couples	42.4 (67)	44.3 (70)	8.9 (14)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Small group work	21.5 (34)	53.2 (84)	5.1 (8)	1.3 (2)	0 (0)
Large group work	24.7 (39)	49.4 (78)	7.6 (12)	2.5 (4)	0 (0)
Guest speakers	11.4 (18)	22.2 (35)	4.4 (7)	1.2 (3)	1 (1)
Exercise sheets / workbooks	34.2 (54)	50.6 (80)	7.0 (11)	3.2 (5)	0 (0)
Overhead transparencies	10.1 (16)	43.0 (68)	8.9 (14)	5.1 (8)	0 (0)
FOCCUS	3.2 (5)	2.5 (4)	1.3 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Videos	15.8 (25)	17.6 (28)	4.4 (7)	3.2 (5)	1.3 (2)

Table 20: Educators' satisfaction with processes used in PMEPs

The need to increase the amount of interaction in the programs was a central theme of many of the educators' comments. Some of these comments included:

> *An increase in the number and amount of small group work and role play and discussion by the educators might be a technique to be explored. These techniques further involve the participants directly and allow for experiential learning*
>
> *More active participation in role plays and games. Experiential learning is an excellent way to learn and grow*
>
> *Develop more opportunities for couples [to work in] small groups*
>
> *[Add a] small amount of variety. I feel the couples get tired of the same routine*
>
> *Method of presenting needs to be more adult education orientated - not so much lecturing*

Others stressed the need for more appropriate resources, especially audio-visual material and access to suitable videotapes. Resources to improve the overall quality of the programs was also mentioned as being important:

> *If more resources were made available the program could be updated and some contemporary techniques used*
>
> *More video material on conflict and communication [is required]*
>
> *More practical Australian videos to enhance aspects of communication and sexuality. This would reinforce the strong positive input already provided*

According to the couples' reflections, their PMEP experience has been a valuable event in their lives - overcoming their reluctance and often outstripping their expectations. This positive picture has been verified by the educators. It is important to note that both couples and educators expressed some concerns about particular aspects of the programs and have provided insightful suggestions about how they could be further improved. The next chapter is concerned with the couples' assessment of the impact of this experience on their relationship, their ideas of marriage and their roles within it and the depth of their intention to marry.

Chapter 9

Changes experienced

Given the diverse nature of the couples attending PMEPs and the variations within the programs themselves, it was not unexpected that they reported a wide range of outcomes as a result of their participation in their programs. This chapter analyses firstly the general outcomes reported by participant couples immediately following their PMEP and three months later, and secondly, specific changes perceived in their relationship, their ideas of marriage and their commitment to marriage.

General outcomes

Participants were asked immediately after they had completed their PMEP (post program) what the three most important results were for them. They were asked this question again during the three month follow-up phase.

Immediately after the program, just under half of the respondents believed the most important outcome for them related to the communication between themselves and their partner. Some couples described the improvement they believed to have occured as been in areas such as listening skills, the ability to be open and honest with each other and the need to talk things out. Other couples mentioned the affirmation they received for their already good skills in this area, while others reported an increased encouragement to communicate and an increased awareness of the need for good communication within their relationship.

Approximately one quarter of the respondents reported an increased ability to handle conflict as being a significant outcome. An increasing understanding of where potential problems might occur in their relationship along with specific strategies to deal with these was mentioned by couples as being a valuable outcome. The reassurance that conflict was normal was also welcomed by participants. A number of respondents specifically mentioned the value of learning new strategies for dealing with anger as being of value.

One fifth of couples valued the opportunity that their PMEP provided for them to increase their understanding of their partner and themselves. A greater awareness of their partners' needs, feelings, attitudes and beliefs was highlighted. Some couples also reported an increased appreciation of their

partner and of having made some 'discoveries' about themselves and each other.

Time to be with their partner and to talk in an intimate way was highlighted as being an outcome for 8% of the respondents. Some couples wrote of the opportunity the program gave them for some 'quality time' with each other where they could 'tell each other how much we appreciate each other' and have some 'good deep conversations.' Some couples reported that the PMEP gave them the opportunity to 'get away from the pre-wedding bustle' and to spend time focusing on each other rather than the wedding. Also reported by couples was the opportunity to share with other couples. It would appear that many couples value the chance to spend time sharing with couples who 'are in the same boat' and 'going through the same thing.'

Six percent of respondents reported that their PMEP gave them opportunity to discuss new ideas with their partner or that the program raised issues that they had not thought to discuss. Eight percent of respondents stated the program was of value because it provided a forum where they were able to have their attitudes, ideas and skills confirmed. Statements from these people included that they felt 'affirmed in their decision to marry', 'affirmed in their commitment', and more confident that they were 'doing the right thing.'

An increased awareness of how their relationship worked was reported as being a significant outcome for approximately 4% of respondents. Comments from these respondents included how their PMEP helped them to 'think realistically' about their relationship, 'build confidence', and for some 'highlight the need for counselling' and for a 'willingness to change.'

An increased understanding and awareness of marriage was highlighted by 8% of participants as being a significant outcome for them. A small number (less than 1%) reported that their PMEP 'increased their understanding of Christian marriage' and provided information about their wedding ceremony.

A small percentage of respondents (less than 2%) reported that the most significant outcome for them was the freedom to marry in the church of their choice as their attendance at the PMEP had fulfilled their obligation to their minister / priest.

There were numerous other outcomes reported by PMEP participants covering a wide range of aspects of their relationship and their future marriage. Some of these are summarised below:

- increased closeness of our relationship
- appreciation of compatibility
- the place of children in marriage
- importance of change
- increased commitment to partner
- opportunity to look at some problems
- discussion on spirituality
- accepting each other
- increasing self disclosure
- helped in the decision making
- improved knowledge
- trust

- created awareness
- where to go for help
- time to reflect
- became engaged
- strengthened relationship
- motivation to go for help
- information from educators
- cultural differences

Three months later, couples who responded to the follow-up questionnaires indicated that the outcomes were not significantly different than those reported at the end of their program. Forty six percent of respondents wrote of outcomes relating to their communication as being of importance for them and 26% described the effect of the increased knowledge and ability to handle conflict as being the most valuable outcome for them. Other outcomes reported by respondents included: increased closeness with partner (19%), understanding of expectations and roles (14%), greater acceptance of their partner (14%), an increased understanding of marriage (13%), increased understanding of partner (10%) and time to talk and be with partner (9%). Three months after their PMEP, 17 % of respondents reported that the major outcome from their program was the confirmation it gave them for their ideas and attitudes towards their relationship and marriage. Fifteen percent valued the experience for the opportunity to discuss new ideas and issues with their partner.

Calling the wedding off

A small number of couples (5 out of the total 82 couples) reported that they had cancelled or postponed their wedding after their attendance at a PMEP. While one of these couples did not attribute their decision to the program, the remaining 4 couples did. Some of these couples' comments include:

> *I feel it exposed weaknesses in our relationship. After the program we reviewed the questions and our answers and could not still resolve many, many issues.*

> *We were made aware that we didn't know each other as well as we thought. [We] discussed issues previously overlooked. Discovered differences we couldn't resolve and which probably would have become major points of conflict in our marriage. I believe now we hadn't thought enough about marriage and everything involved. We would not have lasted. We are very grateful for this program.*

> *The program created expectations in my partner which were impossible to realise.*

While the number of respondents (n = 258) who participated in the post program follow-up was relatively small (especially when compared with the orginal sample size of 1,922), it is evident from these outcomes reported by the participants that PMEPs do have the potential to affect a person's decision to marry. Approximately 5% of the couples who completed a follow-up questionnaire reported they had changed their plans to marry.

New issues raised

At the time of the post-program stage of the study, one third of respondents (32%, n = 1285) reported that their PMEP raised new issues for themselves and their partner. A number of couples reported that the new issues revolved around their approaches to communicating with each other and the ways they handle conflict:

> *We have been given a wider understanding of the issue of conflict* (male)
>
> *Old un-resolved issues were discussed* (female)
>
> *A new outlook and ways to communicate with each other* (male)
>
> *I think its great we have learnt to solve our conflicts* (female)
>
> *The fact that we didn't really listen and understand one another properly* (female)
>
> *The importance of listening to how the other thinks and feels* (male)

The exposure to new ideas about family planning and spirituality within their relationship seemed to act as a catalyst for new issues to be raised for some couples:

> *Family planning gave us options to think about* (male)
>
> *The family planning lady made us think much more about having a family and planning to have a family* (female)
>
> *Natural family planning will now be seriously considered rather than being immediately dismissed as was done prior* (male)
>
> *The role that religion will play in our childrens' lives* (female)
>
> *Our different views about religion* (female)

Exposure to family of origin influences raised some issues for couples:

> *The relevance of alcohol in our relationship - family background* (male)
>
> *The fact that our families had quite an influence on each of us and the two of us coming together will be a sorting out of what information we've accumulated over the years* (female)
>
> *He didn't know my parents had been separated which now explains my actions and feelings about certain issues* (female)

Clarification and sharing of expectations about a number of issues was mentioned as being significant for some couples:

> *My partner expects me to continue working after we have started a family* (female)
>
> *The order of preference in which we devote our time, our money , ourselves and to whom* (male)
>
> *There were little areas, like our roles where we tended to assume things rather than discuss them* (female)
>
> *Who will have control of the finances* (female)
>
> *One new issue was about me having to maybe give up my career for children and that I wanted in some way to keep my career* (female)
>
> *Discussing the roles our in-laws will play* (male)
>
> *Sexuality - my expectations* (female)
>
> *What commitment in marriage really means. For example analysing the words of the marriage vows and saying to each other what they really mean to each other* (male)

A number of couples reported that the issues raised some challenging questions about their relationship and themselves :

> *Coping with living with one another since we've always lived separate. Learning to cope with the fact that we are both career minded* (female)
>
> *Realising we did have problems* (male)
>
> *The enormity of it all* (male)
>
> *The way that I personally feel about myself. My partner was not aware of my self esteem - confidence problems in the past. I feel relieved that he knows now* (female)
>
> *We have to trust each other a bit more* (male)
>
> *To understand my partner more* (male)

At the time of the three month follow up some couples again mentioned new issues that had been raised for them. These covered a wide range of topics including family of origin influences, expectations, roles, family planning and financial issues.

Looking at how our past affects the way we think a relationship should be established. (female)

Better listening (male)

The reason my partner wrote down for ....why he loved me and why he wanted to marry me - this was something new which came as a shock, but the course helped us work it through (female)

They taught us more about finance and budgeting which was very interesting (male)

Alternative techniques for family planning (female)

My family background had in fact made me an over confident person with very little self esteem. After family background[had] been discussed as part of the program, my partner and I discussed my feelings of inadequacy which have since been greatly reduced (female)

New skills learnt

In the post-program questionnaire, only 17% of respondents stated that they did not learn any new skills. An overwhelming majority of respondents (83%, n = 1293) reported that they believed they had learnt some new skills as a result of their program. Their newly learnt skills were predominantly of two types - communication and conflict management skills. Communication skills such as listening, sharing feelings and the ability to clarify issues were mentioned by many respondents. Specific skills such as the use of 'I' messages, the awareness wheel and the dialogue skill were also highlighted.

Conflict skills such as the ability to deal with anger, the ability to compromise and strategies for handling various behaviours during conflict were reported by one third of respondents.

Other skills which couples believed they had learnt included budgeting, family planning, decision making and stress management.

At the time of the post-program follow-up three months later, 135 respondents reaffirmed their learning of these skills and how some of them had been applied in their relationships since the program:

Not getting angry easily - the program helped me a little with this by providing me with a strategy (female)

Developed communication skills and also some personal skills - confidence (female)

Communicating better, appreciation of partner showing of affections (male)

Improving talking, but a long way to go (male)

A greater ability to cope with arguments and problems we encounter, and to appreciate and love each other more (male)

I often reflect on the session on conflict when we are arguing. As we were told at the session, I often find we bring up so many irrelevant things and argue about those rather than the real issue (female)

Communication and problem solving skills have improved. We have learnt to to identify problems and deal with them earlier probably as a result of better communication (male)

Seeking professional help

Bader (1980) reported that one of the significant outcomes couples reported as a result of attending Canadian PMEPs was the willingness to seek help if they had difficulty solving individual or marital problems. In order to see if this was in fact the case with this sample of Australian couples, this question was asked of couples prior to participating in their program and again at its completion. The data for these questions are reported in Table 21 below:

	Pre program (n = 1662)		Post program (n = 1287)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Female	44.7	7.0	47.9	3.4
Male	37.9	16.3	43.6	4.6

Table 21: Percentages of respondents prepared to seek professional help

Overall, the percentage of respondents who indicated they would be willing to seek professional help rose from 82.6% of the sample at time one up to 91.5% of the sample at time two. These figures would support the outcomes reported by Bader (1980) and represent a significant outcome for the programs given their stated preventative agenda.

Matching expectations

At the completion of their PMEP, respondents were asked to indicate how well the program had matched the expectations. Data collected for this question are reported in Table 22.

	Percentage (Total number of respondents = 1323)	Numbers of repondents
Very well	7.7	366
Well	37.9	502
Fairly well	27.1	358
Not very well	5.4	72
Not at all	1.8	24

Table 22: Degree to which programs matched participants' expectations

These figures reveal a relatively close link between the couples' expectations of the programs and their experiences of them. Some respondents did report the program not meeting their expectations, but for different reasons:

> *It was a lot better than what we thought it would be. We enjoyed it and learnt a lot* (female)

> *Was not looking forward to going at all. Would now recommend the two days to anyone entering marriage* (male)

The information gathered from the respondents and reported in this chapter, when compared to the expectations couples held for the programs (reported in Chapter 7), enables the tentative conclusion to be drawn that the programs did in fact realise the expectations of nearly two thirds of the couples who attended them and that the couples were also pleased with their experiences. From the evidence just cited, there is no doubt that couples gained considerably from the PMEPs they attended. The final part of this chapter now explores whether the outcomes linked to this enriching experience resulted in any perceived changes to their relationship, their ideas about marriage and the depth of their intention to marry.

Perceived changes

The couples'relationships

The Relationship Change Scale (RCS) developed by Schlein and Guerney (1978) was modifed for use in this study to collect information about how couples viewed their relationship. This scale seeks to measure an individual's satisfaction with their relationship along several dimensions. Couples were asked to complete this scale before they commenced their PMEP (T_1), immediately after they had completed their program (T_2) and again three months later (T_3).

Total scores were calculated for each time. The numerical information is presented as Table 23 in Appendix H. It is represented graphically in the following figure.

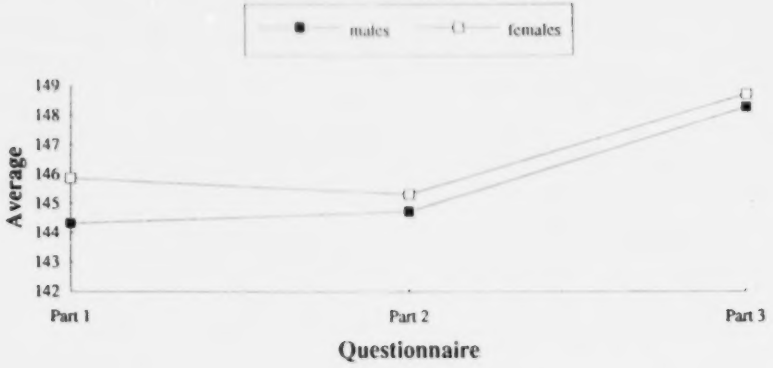

Figure 11: Relationship Satisfaction

Couples report a very high level of satisfaction with their relationship, which changed very little from the time they participated in their PMEP until he follow-up three months later. While the data from the t-test (a statistical test which quantifies the differences between the means of groups over time) is statistically significant, the shift is only marginal and the direction of the shift is from high scores to higher scores. This data is consistent with similar findings by King and Groundwater-Smith (1978), who reported a limited attitude change derived from a PMEP over the short period of the programs.

At the time of completing the follow-up questionnaire, some of the couples in the sample had married, but this made no significant difference to their relationship satisfaction scores.

A factor analysis on the RCS revealed seven factors namely: understanding, trust, openness, communication, independence, personal satisfaction and

relationship satisfaction. The details of these RCS factors with their mean scores and the t values for the three time periods are set out in Table 24 in Appendix H. Even though the differences between the means across the three times are statistically significant, the shifts in real terms for each relationship satisfaction factor are minimal. In other words, the shifts do not represent any significant attitude change. However, further information collected from respondents on how much they believed their relationship had changed as a result of attending a PMEP indicates that they thought there were changes. These, though, were not detected by the RCS. The detail is presented in Table 25 below.

	A great deal		Somewhat		Not at all	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Time 2 (Post -program)	4.6	61	48.6	641	46.7	616
Time 3 (Follow up)	1.4	3	3.3	112	42.9	90

Table 25: Amount of change in relationship reported by respondents.

The comments received from some of those respondents who believed their relationship had changed a great deal reveal some significant insights had been gained:

> *I now have to be more realistic with [my] expectations of my partner and communication* (female)
>
> *We realise that in some areas selfishness played a great part ... We will be looking into this in the future* (female)
>
> *We have both taken a different and more responsible attitude towards our commitment* (male)
>
> *My fiancee and I have put into practice many ideas we've learnt during the course. Our relationship as a result has become stronger in many ways* (male)
>
> *The program has focused on problems which have been slowly brewing in the background which we didn't quite know how to solve, or taken the time to work out fully. A much closer relationship has resulted (male)*
>
> *Our relationship is closer. Now, I can talk openly and freely without feeling I will lose him* (female)
>
> *It has become much stronger, through open communication and resolution of problem areas. It has also greatly helped me to look at my own*

shortcoming before focusing on my partner's. We have added commitment and recognise more good in each other (female)

We have realised that our overall communication needs a lot of work (female)

I now realise that there were many things that I misunderstood about my partner and the way she looked at things. I have to re-think many of my ideals and values (male)

Some couples who rated their relationship as having changed 'somewhat' also appeared to have increased their understanding of their relationship, as the following examples illustrate:

I find the path ahead of me a little scary and feel uneasy, but I'm sure now that we can work through it (female)

I think that my partner and myself now more clearly understand how important better communication is to our relationship (male)

Issues were brought up and these were a catalyst to communication. I feel these issues would have eventually come up but the program brought them out earlier which I feel was good (female)

Couples' level of consensus

A second dimension of the couples' relationships which was selected for exploration was their level of consensus over a number of relationship issues. Data were collected using a modified version of the Marital Consensus Scale (MCS) at three points in time. Total scores for both female and male respondents were calculated and are presented in Figure 12 below (see Table 26, Appendix H, for statistical information).

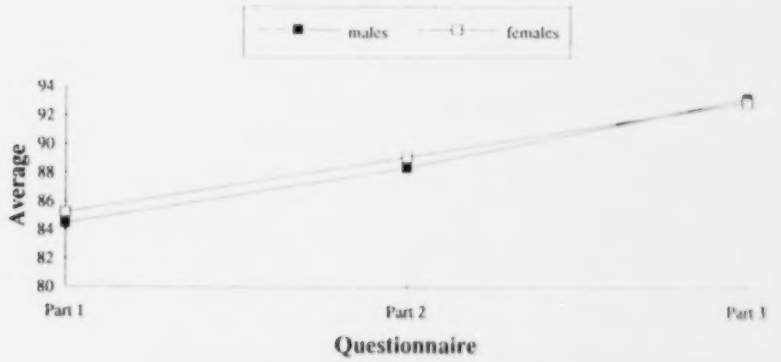

Figure 12: Couples' reported levels of consensus

There is very little difference, in the follow-up sample, between the level of consensus reported by those couples who had married since their PMEP compared with those who were yet to marry (see Table 27, Appendix H).

The increase in the level of consensus reported here cannot be linked solely to the couples' attendence at a PMEP. Factors such as the size of the sample group at the time of the follow-up means that the increase in the *t* - values may be attributable to the sample size rather than any real measurable shift in the level of consensus. There is also no way of controlling this sample to allow for factors external to the program which could also be responsible for the measured shift. For example, a couple's consensus might have increased because the completion of wedding arrangements could have removed a potentially large source of conflict. However, the evidence given by the couples about the degree to which they have gained increased communication and conflict management skills would perhaps support the hypothesis that the level of consensus might rise as a result of their attendance at a program. This hypothesis, given the trends indicated here, certainly warrants further investigation.

Ideas about marriage

This section of the study aimed to explore how couples reported their ideas about marriage after the completion of their PMEP. These data were collected in two ways, firstly by asking couples to describe any changes they believed to have occurred and secondly, to rate how they believe certain roles and tasks might be distributed in their marriage relationship using a modifed version of the Family Tasks Inventory (FTI) used by King and Groundwater-Smith (1978).

Immediately after their PMEP, nearly one half of the respondents reported that their ideas on the type of marriage they desired had changed . At the time of completing the follow-up survey, however, only a small number of respondents reported any changes to their ideas (Table 28).

	A great deal		Somewhat		Not at all	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Time 2 (Post -program)	42.4	557	51.0	670	6.5	86
Time 3 (Follow up)	2.4	5	25.9	55	69.3	147

Table 28: Amount of change in ideas about marriage reported by couples.

A number of the respondents gave details of how their ideas about marriage had been changed:

> *It has made me rethink how well my partner and I know each other and how compatible we are and whether we need more time before we make such*

an important commitment (female)

Many of my reservations have been dealt with (male)

[My ideas have] changed in realising to a greater extent what marriage is all about. [I] have to improve my relationship and [find] ways to make it grow and succeed (male)

It gives you a greater appreciation of what is to come (male)

I understand better what marriage is all about and there is a lot to think and talk about (female)

They have changed because I now view marriage as a thing to work towards instead of a piece of paper (female)

My ideas have changed from a 'perfect harmony' to one where there is give and take (female)

Realising that the wedding is really only one day so focus on what the real issues are (male)

There were a large number of responses that indicated the couples were linking perceived changes of their view of their relationship to their ideas of marriage. The following quotes illustrate this assertion:

Mainly bringing to light many things that were not clear to me in relation to problem solving, other personal needs, her personal needs and wants (male)

Communicating better (female)

Learning to cope with disagreements (male)

I understand my fiancee more and our relationship is geting closer and warmer (male)

More aware of how to try and resolve conflicts (female)

It focused more of my attention on the relationship - instead of assuming it would work (male)

Helped me to understand the feelings and needs of my partner (male)

The discrepancy between the changes in ideas reported by couples immediately after their PMEP and those reported by the sample at the time of the follow-up may be a consequence of the reduced sample size at the latter time. Alternatively this observation could be attributed to the 'halo' effect (the 'end

of program high') that often occurs at the end of a learning program. Notwithstanding, the large number of comments given by respondents at the completion of their PMEP would at least indicate that the PMEP acted as a stimulus for them to think in a deeper way about the commitment they were undertaking as well as the nature of their relationship.

Roles in the marriage relationship

The Family Task Inventory (FTI) was used as a basis for the development of a scale to obtain a further indication of how couples perceive their future marriage relationship. This scale asked respondents to indicate their perceptions of how a range of tasks and roles might be allocated in their marriage. The FTI has a range of 1 to 85, with scores on the lower end of the scale indicating that the respondent would take major responsibility for the tasks, and scores on the upper end indicating that the respondent's partner would be largely responsible for carrying out the roles within the marriage.

The figures below show some minor shifts in the percentage distribution of responses from group 3 to group 4 over the three time phases for females and males separately; however, the fact is that there are very few individuals with scores in the extreme ranges. This suggests that both males and females initially have an egalitarian approach to marriage, and that this continues over time.

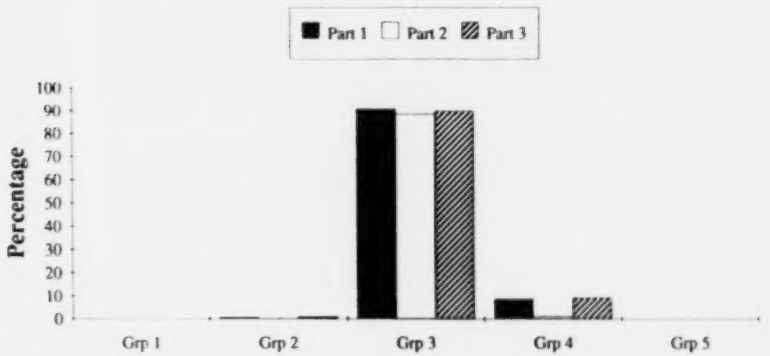

Figure 13: Total scores on the Family Tasks Inventory for females.

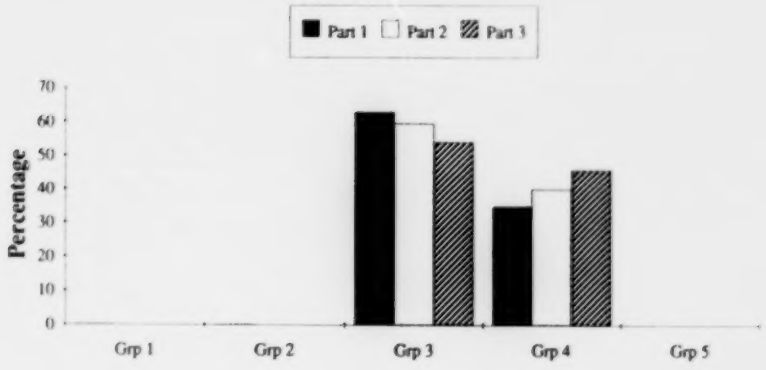

Figure 14: Total scores on the Family Tasks Inventory for males

The FTI can be divided into three sub-categories comprised of 'authority', 'household' and 'career and lifestyle' items. When these categories were separated by gender, the above same pattern of egalitarianism was found. Perhaps one exception to this is the 'household' items, where females indicated they would be more involved with these roles than the males. This trend is minimal, however, and it is fair to conclude that most couples report they would in fact expect to have a shared relationship.

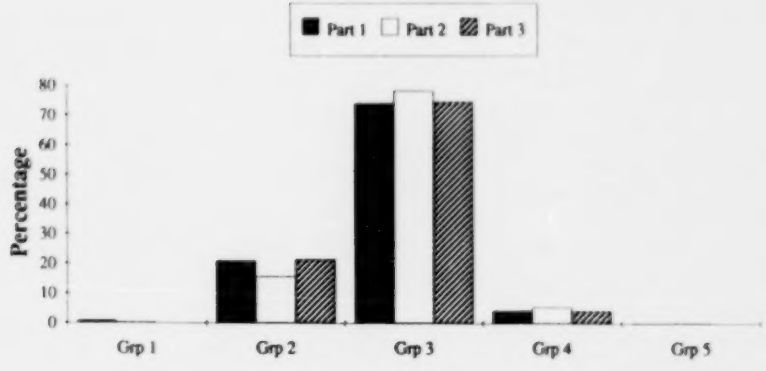

Figure 15: Household tasks for females

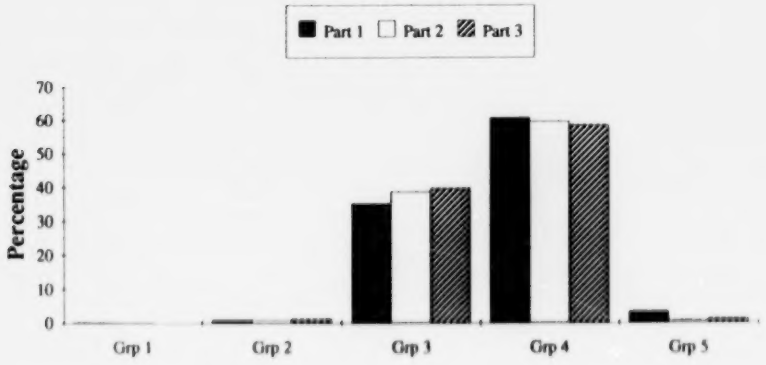

Figure 16: Household tasks for males

Commitment to relationship and marriage

This part of the study aimed to gain some insight into the couples' intentions and commitment to their marriage. Respondents were asked to rate their commitment to their partner and their marriage before they commenced their PMEP and immediately after its completion. As was to be expected, the majority of the respondents indicated that their commitment to their partner was very high and remained high. At the completion of the PMEP 96.6% indicated that they were 'very committed' to their relationship while only 1.8 % of the total sample indicated that they were 'mostly committed' to their relationship, and 1.2 % described their partner as being 'not at all committed'.

With regard to their commitment to marry, at the completion of their programs 96.4% stated that they were 'very comitted' while only 2.7% (36 respondents) indicated that they were 'mostly committed' and 0.5% (6 respondents) said they were 'somewhat commited'.

While the majority of respondents reported no change to their commitment to their relationship and to their marriage, a number indicated in their written anwers that they believed their commitment, already very strong, had been reinforced or strengthened:

> *Our commitment is stronger. We can understand each other [more because] of what was discussed* (male)

I think I'm more determined. This is probably because this program is the first thing we've really done since our engagement (2 weeks prior) so the two together are our first serious steps - so I'm starting to think more seriously (female)

I am more committed and aware of identifying any signs of trouble or conflict in our relationship (male)

Our commitment has certainly grown stronger (female)

No change, just reinforcement (male)

I feel I know my partner a lot better. My respect and trust for my partner has grown and I feel a lot happier (female)

It has made me more committed to WORK at my relationship, because it is the best thing in my life (female)

In describing their higher level of commitment, some respondents alluded to having their doubts and fears allayed:

Erased any lingering doubts (male)

More confident in partner's love for me - therefore less afraid of the commitment (female)

Doubts I had have been dispelled ...[but] we have still to solve some problems in [our] relationship (male)

There were also a small number of comments from couples who, while asserting strongly their commitment to their marriage and their relationship, also expressed some concerns about their relationship:

Very committed - but feel the need to put in more work (female)

Although the wedding is just around the corner I feel there are several key issues we must discuss before we tie the knot - things that were raised in the program (female)

Partner shows some reservations and thus I am left with doubts (male)

This program has given me a better outlook on marriage and has brought to my attention certain aspects of our relationship that could cause problems (female)

These comments perhaps reveal the struggle of these couples as they come to terms with the sometimes high expectations on them to marry and the doubts and concerns they have about their relationship and their future together.

This chapter has examined the extent and nature of changes reported by couples as a result of participating in their PMEPs. The main findings were that one third of respondents claimed that their PMEP raised new issues for themselves and their partner, that an overwhelming majority of respondents reported that they had learnt new skills, that the proportions of couples willing to seek professional help if there were later marital problems increased over the time of the program, that couples reported a relatively close match between their expectations of the program and their experiences of them, and that almost one half of the respondents (though this figure dropped away by the time of the follow-up survey) reported their ideas on the type of marriage they desired had changed as a result of the program. While some of the measured changes did not show statistical significance, there can be little doubt that PMEPs - in the eyes of the participants themselves - do offer some benefits for couples preparing for marriage. The final chapter now seeks to draw together the main conclusions from this overall study and to identify some challenges that remain in this very interesting but largely unresearched field.

Chapter 10

Conclusions and challenges

This project, like our water skiiers on the cover, has been pulled along at a great pace. It set out to examine PMEPs as they have developed and are practised Australia-wide. This concluding chapter retraces the journey and looks to future challenges.

Background and characteristics of PMEPs

The enquiry has looked at the history of PMEPs particularly since the second world war and has described the growth in PMEPs, influenced initially by the churches' interests and latterly by the needs of the couples and the resourcing by government of the churches' so-called 'welfare' but not 'religious' activities. The historical background has shown a movement from the didactic to more facilitative and reflective programs. It is only in the last few years that there have been attempts to professionalise and centralise ideas and approaches which have largely built on the accumulated experiences of the local educators.

Apart from their group character, PMEPs have been shown to have three significant dimensions: they are human relations education, church based education both preventative and inspirational and life transition education. From an operational perspective, PMEPs are of relatively short duration and are offered on the whole, as a 'one size fits all' program to any couple who enrols. The research project's first major task was to investigate PMEPs and their educators and participant couples in 1992.

Programs, educators and couples

The mapping exercise showed just over 500 PMEPs offered throughout Australia in 1992 by the 28 agencies for which such information was available. It is revealed as a sizeable undertaking almost exclusively run by church groups, mainly Catholic and Anglican. More than half of the resource people are volunteers from churches supporting PMEPs who had received various kinds of training. The aims and ideals of the surveyed programs identified

several goals including: meeting and sharing ideas with other couples; clarifying couples expectations of marriage; appraising weaknesses and strengths of relationships; developing skills for married life and, as would be expected from a church sponsored activity, exploring the Christian dimensions of marriage. The style varied from being learner centred and flexible to more structured, pre-set programs.

This range of the programs offered was further enriched by the diversity of facilitators presenting the programs which again manifested a wide range of attitudes and pre-occupations. They called themselves facilitators, presenters, leaders and spoke of using adult learning principles and a fair degree of self disclosure in their teaching. Their teaching agenda stressed that marriage was lifelong, required effort, was created and shaped by the couples themselves, and that while PMEPs were a useful start much more ongoing learning would be required in the course of married life. They mentioned several times that they were also on the lookout for trouble signs or possible difficulties they might see developing in any of the couples attending the programs.

The PMEPs and educators investigated in this study display a level of awareness and sophistication which may not have been commonly expected of PMEP educators. The single case study provided for example in Senediak's (1990) paper shows a version of late 1980s PMEPs as a mixture of fairly 'folksy' heart to heart talks and skills training constructed with a strong church base and provided by volunteer couples who are active church members with established and apparently satisfactory marriages. Certainly four years or so down the track, Senediak's case study seems to refer to a minority version and to be becoming less and less typical as programs and educators update.

While the attitudes and aspirations of the educators present in the national survey point to a maturing of attitudes, the traditional church practice of recruiting marriage educators from church going couples with a presumed happy marriage may tend to select couples acceptable to the interests of the church and not necessarily to couples, particularly those with little interest in religion.

The final section of the 'mapping the field' exercise profiled more than 800 participant couples. Approximately 400 of these were Catholic and 200 Anglican, the two groups effectively comprising two thirds of the couples in the survey. As has been shown, this high proportion is partially demographic since in fact most church weddings are held in these two churches and partially a function of the centralised nature of PMEPs in these churches which makes them easier to survey. It was then significant to discover that two thirds of the couples attending PMEPs and planning a church wedding had virtually no links with other church activities.

The ambiguity experienced by couples wishing for a kind of 'Clayton's' church wedding has some analogy, as has been pointed out above, with various churches' different approaches to PMEPs and their levels of tolerance

of the ambiguity displayed by some of these couples. Some church people are more interested in shaping people to fit the churches' expectations; others want to shape the church to fit the people's expectations. The comments in Chapter 3 about the various styles of the churches have relevance here. For some church people, this secularised version of Christianity may be easily tolerated. Other would resist what they would see as a kind of collusion to 'water down' a Christian sacrament to suit people who in many ways would be seen as non-Christians.

If in fact couples wishing to marry in a church have no actual links with the contemporary beliefs and practices of Christianity, the Christian ceremonial may not meet their needs and in fact may be counterproductive and generate feelings of alienation rather than support for their life decision. There is thus a challenge for churches sponsoring the marriages of non-church affiliated couples. Christian ceremonies for cultural but not religious Christians carried out under Christian auspices needs to be actively shaped to meet the needs of celebrant and couples. This needs to be faced and accounted for in church sponsored PMEPs.

An alternative is to promote appropriate PMEPs for non-church related couples. Non-church related PMEP providers (apart from the Family Relationships Institute in Melbourne which successfully recruits couples) find that couples do not enrol in sufficient numbers to make specific PMEPs worthwhile. It would require changes in incentives and more active promotion to become viable but it may be in fact what has to happen.

Experiences of PMEPs

The couples' experiences of the PMEP they attended, again giving the quasi-mandatory status of many programs, was surprisingly positive. The only change recommended by significant numbers of the small group not wholly satisfied with the PMEP they attended was to reduce the time allocated for presentations from the educators and increase the time allocated for 'couple time' so the partners could interact and discuss more.

When most couples reported being highly satisfied with the PMEP they attended, their highest satisfaction was not because they gained new and important information (although in fact they often valued the information they did receive) but because they learned skills in communication and conflict resolution and they had special time to reflect on themselves and their relationship.

From an educators' perspective, the couples validate weighting the program more towards experiential rather than didactic educative strategies without favouring one exclusively. The life transition education perspective discussed in Chapter 3 points to the couples' pre-occupation with *choice* which takes them intensely into their own individuated selves and the validity of the

reasons behind their life decisions. 'Have I done the right thing?' 'why am I doing this?' 'will it last?' 'am I committed for life?' are all intensely personal and individuated questions which seem to crowd out more generalised questions concerning the division of labour in marriage and the crises couples usually encounter which may be of greater importance in the later years of marriage. It may be that couples at this point in their lives 'bracket out' what they have in common with others to consider the specific characteristics of their individuated relationship. Later will be the time to address what they have in common with other couples and other situations. At the moment the thrust seems to be with 'me as me' and 'thou as thou' and 'us as us'. It may have been this characteristic of the stage of their life that prompted high approval for a program that helped confirm their ideas and attitudes to their relationship and to marriage; or alternatively for a small number and obviously in more traumatic circumstances, helped them interrogate the reasons for their choice and decide not to proceed with marriage at least at the stage they had planned.

This study has also highlighted some features of what might be called the 'post- engagement pre-marriage' phase of couples' lives which inclines them to focus on what brings them together and to turn away from that which they fear may part them; to be intensely interested in matters directly concerning their particular circumstances rather than more generalised information. Partner selection, marital roles and the division of domestic labour which are major issues in many marriages appear to belong to a different period in people's and couple's lives, either before marriage is being contemplated or in times after marriage when couples are confronted with dimensions of marriage they share with others in similar situations.

This information tends to favour a more comprehensive human relationships education program offering a range of learning opportunities at different times of people's lives. PMEPs could then be left to focus on deep reflection and skilling for married life.

Outcomes of PMEPs

The second part of the research enquiry examined couples' experiences of PMEPs to see if they were enriched by them and whether they experienced any change in the quality of their relationship, their ideas about marriage and marital roles and the depth of their intention to marry. Given that most couples rated their relationship in relatively glowing terms at the beginning of the survey, they noted little difference in how they thought it had developed as a result of their having attended a PMEP. A number of couples initially reported that their ideas about marriage had been favourably influenced by their experience of PMEPs. The smaller group of these respondents who also filled out the third questionnaire three months later, reported little change. Some couples did however increase their desire to share the roles and tasks of married life.

While the majority of repondents reported no change in their commitment to their relationship and to their marriage, a number indicated in their written answers that they believed their commitment, already quite strong, had been reinforced or strengthened.

This reinforces the notion that one of the important functions of PMEPs as a form of life transition education is to create a healthy sense of challenge around commitment and choice, so that couples already largely entranced by each other can use the PMEP program to explore the implication of this deep engagement at a time when there is a lot of positive energy for participants to examine and confront pockets of confusion or 'holding back' in themselves or each other and increase the sense of transition to the new and desired state by working to find and achieve increased oneness in their relationship.

The increased 'groundedness' of the couples' commitment is one of the radical benefits of PMEPs which couples have celebrated and which is one of the reasons why, despite all kinds of reluctances among some at the start of the program, so many couples value the PMEP experience and recommend it so wholeheartedly to others. This approval seems to indicate that, on the whole, the evolution of PMEPs to their present balance of facilitated reflection and introductory skills training seems to have 'got it right'.

Future challenges

This study has identified several practical issues and more theoretical questions which require further research and action.

The referral and recruitment processes for PMEPs is an issue requiring some attention, particularly the handling of the mandatory dimension of some programs and whether there are other less directive ways to recruit couples.

In addition, a solution needs to be found for the difficulties derived from having a standard package for couples whose experiences may be radically different. A major difference was identified between the needs of older and more experienced couples and those of their younger and less experienced counterparts. A possible solution, already implemented in some places, is to provide different PMEP versions or parts of one for experienced and less experienced groups of couples. This needs to be investigated and reported upon for other providers.

The recruitment of PMEP educators needs to be widened and additional criteria developed to ensure that PMEP educators are chosen not simply because they are church goers or have a long lasting marriage but because they have sensitivity to the couples in their needs and struggles and have or can develop skills to facilitate their learning.

One of the major dilemmas facing PMEPs and their sponsors is how to widen the churches' role to extend PMEPs to non-church related couples still wishing to marry in a church and, on the other hand, to develop effective ways to extend PMEPs as an acknowledged source of enrichment to couples other than those seeking to marry in a church. Besides better marketing and incentives to attract couples to standard PMEPs, there is also an area where some action research might be implemented by couples themselves and where a variation of a group-directed study circle might be trialled.

Another issue concerns the differences between various forms of PMEPs and their specific approaches. The research reported in this book focused on the experiences of couples who participated in any form of PMEP. It was not the purpose of this study to differentiate between the couples' experiences of different kinds of PMEP. Further research hopefully will spend more time on understanding the various kinds of PMEP and providing some approaches to evaluation for individual programs.

The second category of future work relates to important research questions which were deliberately postponed in order to complete this first project. Future research needs to examine and evaluate various teaching/learning processes within PMEPs, an area not directly tackled in this study. Since couples appear to value the processes of assisted reflection and skills training, it would be useful to carry out research into improving ways of facilitating these kinds of learning.

A related area of enquiry concerns the 'couple' and 'group' nature of PMEPs. Some PMEPs focus almost exclusively on the couple as a unit with work done in couples and exercises for individuals and almost no wider group interaction. Other programs incorporate a range of activities, such as group discussions, games and brainstorming. The dynamics of these groupings and their influence on learning is an area requiring further research.

Doing research with couples about to marry is to deal with largely happy people in a world where happiness is in short supply. It will be important for PMEPs to continue to provide ways for couples to consolidate their happiness and to get down to earth while keeping their heads still firmly in the clouds. To borrow from the water skiing analogy, while PMEPs help couples get up and going as married couples, their value extends to preparing them for the choppy water further out from the shore, not just to be warned but to be forearmed and confident. In this age of uncertainty and apprehension, it is a service to be valued and offered as widely as possible.

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Appendix A

PRE-MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

RESEARCH PROJECT

MAPPING INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

AGENCY / GROUP:.....

CONTACT NAME:.....

ADDRESS:.....P/C.....

TELEPHONE NUMBER:.....

DATE INTERVIEWED:.....

1. COULD YOU TELL ME WHAT TOPICS ARE OFFERED AT THE PRE-MARRIAGE COURSES WHICH YOUR GROUP / AGENCY CONDUCTS?

2. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE CONTENT FOR EACH OF THESE TOPICS?

3. WHAT SORTS OF PROCESSES (TEACHING STRATEGIES) DO THEY USE IN THESE COURSES?

4. COMMENCING WITH WHEN THE COUPLES ARRIVE, COULD YOU PLEASE TELL ME WHAT HAPPENS AT YOUR COURSES?

5. WHO ARE THE FACILITATORS FOR THE PRE-MARRIAGE EDUCATION COURSES YOU CONDUCT? (ARE THEY LAY COUPLES, THE PRIEST...)

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6. HOW DO YOU RECRUIT YOUR ENGAGED COUPLES FOR YOUR PRE-MARRIAGE EDUCATION COURSES?

7. IS THERE A SET REFERRAL PROCESS?

YES / NO

IF YES, PLEASE DESCRIBE IT

8. WHAT LEVEL OF FEES DOES YOUR AGENCY / GROUP CHARGE FOR COUPLES TO ATTEND YOUR COURSES?

9. DOES YOUR GROUP / AGENCY PROVIDE THE COUPLES WITH ANY PRE COURSE INFORMATION?

YES / NO

IF YES, COULD YOU PLEASE DESCRIBE IT?

10. WHICH DEPARTMENT IN THE CHURCH / ORGANISATION SPONSORS YOUR PROGRAMME?

11. DOES YOUR GROUP / AGENCY HAVE A POLICY STATEMENT ABOUT YOUR PRE-MARRIAGE EDUCATION COURSES?

YES / NO

COULD YOU GIVE ME SOME DETAILS ABOUT IT?

** ASK THE RESPONDENT IF IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO HAVE A COPY OF 1) COURSE BROCHURE
2) COURSE OUTLINES
3) POLICY STATEMENTS

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Appendices

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Appendix B

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CONFIDENTIAL

CATHOLIC SOCIETY FOR MARRIAGE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR MARRIAGE EDUCATION

The purpose of this information sheet is to collect some background information about the people who provide marriage education to couples preparing for marriage.
Your assistance in completing this information sheet would be greatly appreciated.
Your answers will be kept confidential; no names are required.
Most questions require you to tick a box or give brief written answers.

1.

What is the name of the group or agency you work for as a marriage educator?

_____

2.

How many pre-marriage education programs:

(a) did you conduct in 1991? _____

(b) will you conduct in 1992? _____

3.

During 1991 how many couples participated in the programs you conducted?

_____ couples

4.

Do you usually work in pre-marriage education programs:

☐ by yourself?

☐ with your partner?

☐ with a team of people?

If you work in a team of people, how many other people make up the team?

_____ people

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Love, Sex and Waterskiing

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5.

How long have you been working in pre-marriage education programs?

_____ months _____ years

6.

In conducting your pre-marriage education programs, are you:

☐ a paid educator?

☐ a volunteer?

7.

How were you recruited to work in pre-marriage education programs?

_____

_____

_____

8.

Have you received any specific training for your role as a marriage educator?

☐ yes

☐ no

If yes,

(a) please describe what training you have had:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

(b) approximately how many hours was your training?

_____ hours

(c) what agency / group conducted this training?

_____

_____

9.

The following questions are asking you for some background information to assist us in drawing up a national profile of marriage educators.

(a) Sex:

- ☐ male
- ☐ female

(b) Age:

- ☐ 17 - 24
- ☐ 25 - 34
- ☐ 35 - 44
- ☐ 45 - 54
- ☐ 55 - 64
- ☐ over 65

(c) Country of birth: _____

(d) Your occupation (e.g. primary teacher, home maker): _____

(e) Current marital status:

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Widowed

(f) What is the highest level of education you completed?

- ☐ Year 11 or less
- ☐ Year 12
- ☐ Trade / Apprenticeship
- ☐ Certificate from business college or TAFE
- ☐ Tertiary diploma
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Postgraduate diploma or higher degree

(g) If you have a post-secondary qualification, please state:
(i) the discipline area(s) (e.g.. history, science, social work, etc.)

_____

(ii) and the title(s)

_____

(h) Religion: _____

10.

How would you describe your way of working in a pre-marriage education program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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11.

When you work in a pre-marriage education program, what are the things you are most concerned about?

Thankyou for completing this information sheet on pre-marriage educators. Please put it in the stamped envelope provided, and post it to the Research Team at the University of South Australia.

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Appendix C

CONFIDENTIAL

CATHOLIC SOCIETY FOR MARRIAGE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR MARRIAGE EDUCATION

SURVEY OF

PRE-MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

1992

PART I

This survey is being conducted to collect information about Pre-Marriage Education Programs across Australia. Your assistance in completing this questionnaire would be greatly appreciated. Your answers will be kept confidential.
Most questions require you to tick a box, or circle a response. There are some questions that will require brief written answers.

1.

Who suggested that you attend this pre-marriage education program?

* Please tick as many boxes as apply to you.

Minister/priest	1
Marriage celebrant	2
Friends	3
Parents	4
Other family	5
Local community group	6
Myself	7
My partner	8
We decided together	9
Other _____	10

2.

What do you expect to gain from this pre-marriage education program?

* Tick as many boxes as apply to your own personal expectations of the program.

To learn about marriage and relationships	1
To get assistance in developing a better relationship	2
To learn more about our relationship	3
To improve the way we communicate	4
To learn how to handle differences	5
To understand my partner better	6
To help my partner understand me better	7
To learn more about Christian Marriage	8
Other _____	9

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3.

Here are some statements about yourself, your partner and your relationship at the present time.

* Circle the response that comes closest to how you feel for each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with myself as a person	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with my partner as a person	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with our ability to communicate	1	2	3	4	5
I express concern and warmth towards my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to express myself openly to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my partner's likes and dislikes	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to listen to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I trust my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I feel intimate with my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am confident in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5
We are able to handle our disagreements constructively	1	2	3	4	5
We are satisfied with our level of intimacy	1	2	3	4	5
I have difficulty in talking to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to express positive feelings to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to express negative feelings to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to share my personal concerns with my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to believe and accept positive feelings my partner expresses towards me	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to deal constructively with negative feelings my partner expresses towards me	1	2	3	4	5
I have an understanding of the kind of relationship I want to have in the future with my partner	1	2	3	4	5

4.

Thinking about your relationship, would you agree or disagree with the following statements?

* Circle the response that comes closest to how you feel for each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My partner sees me as a satisfactory partner	1	2	3	4	5
My partner sees him or herself as a satisfactory partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am clearly aware of my partner's needs and desires	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my own feelings	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my own needs and desires in this relationship	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my partner's feelings	1	2	3	4	5
I feel accepted as a person by my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I consider my partner to be my best friend	1	2	3	4	5
I get as much as I give in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5
I maintain separate activities of my own	1	2	3	4	5
I have interests that are different from my partner's	1	2	3	4	5
I keep certain things private from my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I let my partner have his / her own way	1	2	3	4	5
I let my partner know my fears and weaknesses	1	2	3	4	5
I encourage my partner to discuss feelings	1	2	3	4	5
I feel free to be myself with my partner	1	2	3	4	5

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5.

Most couples have some areas of disagreement in their relationship.
Please indicate the amount of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner at the present time.

* Circle the number which applies to you in each of the following items.
Use the scale below for your ratings.

7 = Always agree
6 = Frequently agree
5 = Occasionally agree
4 = Uncertain
3 = Occasionally disagree
2 = Frequently disagree
1 = Always disagree

9 = Not applicable

Handling finances	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Leisure time interests and recreation activities	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Friends	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Aims, goals and things believed important	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Amount of time spent together	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Ways of dealing with parents and future in-laws	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Making major decisions	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Household tasks	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Showing affection	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Work matters	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Sexual intimacy	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Amount of time spent on individual interests	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Drinking/drug use habits	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Handling conflicts	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Raising children	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Religious beliefs	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9

6.

Who do you think will take primary responsibility for the following tasks and roles in your future marriage?

* Please circle the response which best suits your ideas for each of the following items.

	I will do this all the time	I will mainly do this	We will both do this	My partner will mainly do this	My partner will do this all the time	Uncertain
Making financial decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6
Playing with the children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Maintaining the household	1	2	3	4	5	6
Disciplining the children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cleaning the house	1	2	3	4	5	6
Initiating sexual intimacy	1	2	3	4	5	6
Doing the grocery shopping	1	2	3	4	5	6
Caring for children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Settling arguments	1	2	3	4	5	6
Doing the laundry	1	2	3	4	5	6
Inviting guests to the home	1	2	3	4	5	6
Taking initiative for spiritual life	1	2	3	4	5	6
Earning the income	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cooking the meals	1	2	3	4	5	6
Acting as spokesperson for the family	1	2	3	4	5	6
Deciding how leisure time should be spent	1	2	3	4	5	6
Making major family decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6

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7.

(a) How long have you and your partner been in this relationship?

Years

Months

(b) Are you engaged to be married?

Yes 1

No 2

(c) Approximately how long will it be before you are married?

Months

Not Sure

(d) Where are you planning to be married?

In a Church 1

In a Registry Office 2

Other 3

(e) After marriage do you and your partner expect to be employed?

Yes, both of us 1

No, only myself 2

No, only my partner 3

Uncertain 4

(f) Are you planning to have children?

Yes 1

No 2

Uncertain 3

(g) If yes, how many children do you expect to have?

(h) After marriage where do you intend to live?

In your own home/flat/unit 1

Rented house/flat/unit 2

With parents/in-laws 3

With other relatives 4

With friends 5

Uncertain 6

8.

(a) How many children are in your family?

Sisters

Brothers

(b) Has your mother ever been: Yes No

divorced? 1 4

separated? 2 5

widowed? 3 6

(c) Has your father ever been: Yes No

divorced? 1 4

separated? 2 5

widowed? 3 6

(d) Have any of your brothers ever been: Yes No

divorced? 1 4

separated? 2 5

widowed? 3 6

(e) Have any of your sisters ever been: Yes No

divorced? 1 4

separated? 2 5

widowed? 3 6

(f) Would you say that your parents are/were generally happy in their marriage?

Yes 1

No 2

(g) What were your parents' reactions to your marriage plans?

Very positive 1

Positive 2

Mixed 3

Negative 4

Very negative 5

9.

How committed are you and your partner to seeing your relationship continue?

	Yourself	Your partner
Very committed	1	5
Mostly committed	2	6
Somewhat committed	3	7
Not at all committed	4	8

10.

How committed are you to marrying your partner?

Very committed	1
Mostly committed	2
Somewhat committed	3
Not at all committed	4

11.

If you were unable to solve a specific problem in your marriage, would you consider seeking professional help?

Yes 1

No 2

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Appendices

12.

We would like to know, in general, what marriage and your relationship means to you now.

To me, marriage means _____

To me, our relationship means _____

What three things about your relationship please you the most?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

What three things about your relationship would you like to develop further?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

13.

These questions are asking you for background information so that we can draw a picture of who attends Pre-Marriage Education Programs.

(a) Sex M F

(b) Age Years

(c) Country of birth of parents.

Mother _____

Father _____

(d) Your occupation _____

(e) Have you lived in a previous relationship without being married?

Yes 1

No 2

(f) Where do you currently live?

Alone 1

With parents 2

With partner 3

With others 4

(g) Current marital status

Single 1

Divorced 2

Separated 3

Widowed 4

(h) What is the highest level of education you completed?

Year 11 or less 1

Year 12 2

Trade/Apprenticeship 3

Certificate from business college or TAFE 4

Tertiary diploma 5

Bachelor's degree 6

Postgraduate diploma or higher degree 7

(i) Religion _____

(j) Frequency of Church attendance

Weekly 1

Monthly 2

Seldom 3

Never 4

(k) What is your personal gross yearly income?

None 1

Less than $5,000 2

$5,000 - 10,000 3

$10,001 - 20,000 4

$20,001 - 30,000 5

$30,001 - 40,000 6

$40,001 - 50,000 7

Over $50,000 8

To assist us with matching your answers to your partner's answers, please place your initials and your partner's initials in the boxes below.

Your initials

Your partner's initials

Thankyou for completing this questionnaire.

Please put the questionnaire in the envelope provided to ensure confidentiality, and return it to the Educator who will mail it to the Research Team at the University of South Australia.

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Appendix D

CONFIDENTIAL

CATHOLIC SOCIETY FOR MARRIAGE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR MARRIAGE EDUCATION

SURVEY OF

PRE-MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

1992

PART II

This survey is being conducted to collect information about Pre-Marriage Education Programs across Australia. Your assistance in completing this questionnaire would be greatly appreciated. Your answers will be kept confidential.
Most questions require you to tick a box, or circle a response. There are some questions that will require brief written answers.

1.

How satisfied were you with the organisation of the pre-marriage education program you have just participated in?

* Circle the numbers which apply to you in each of the following items.

5 = Very satisfied
4 = Satisfied
3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
2 = Dissatisfied
1 = Very dissatisfied

9 = Not applicable

The amount of pre-course contact you received	5	4	3	2	1	9
Adequacy of pre-course information you received	5	4	3	2	1	9
The amount of fees you were charged	5	4	3	2	1	9
The venue for the program	5	4	3	2	1	9
The referral process	5	4	3	2	1	9
The length of the program	5	4	3	2	1	9
The timetabling of the program	5	4	3	2	1	9
Any arrangements for post-course follow-up referral	5	4	3	2	1	9

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2.

How satisfied were you with the program you have just participated in?

* Circle the number which is closest to your feelings in each of the following items.

5 = Very satisfied
4 = Satisfied
3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
2 = Dissatisfied
1 = Very dissatisfied

9 = Not applicable

Way the program was structured	5	4	3	2	1	9
Amount of time for discussion with my partner	5	4	3	2	1	9
Amount of time for group discussion	5	4	3	2	1	9
My involvement in activities	5	4	3	2	1	9
Length of sessions generally	5	4	3	2	1	9
Opportunity to ask questions of my own	5	4	3	2	1	9
My interest in the sessions	5	4	3	2	1	9
Educator's style/clarity	5	4	3	2	1	9
Educator's answers to my questions	5	4	3	2	1	9
Feeling comfortable with session content	5	4	3	2	1	9
Use of stories/humour/examples by educator	5	4	3	2	1	9
Information provided on the topics	5	4	3	2	1	9
Challenging experiences	5	4	3	2	1	9
Relevance of information to me personally	5	4	3	2	1	9
Relevance of information to my relationship	5	4	3	2	1	9

3.

How helpful or unhelpful was each topic for your relationship?

* Using the following scale, circle the appropriate numbers.

5 = Very helpful
4 = Helpful
3 = Neither helpful nor unhelpful
2 = Unhelpful
1 = Very unhelpful

9 = Not applicable

Family of origin	5	4	3	2	1	9
Finance/Budgeting	5	4	3	2	1	9
Marital roles	5	4	3	2	1	9
Expectations of marriage	5	4	3	2	1	9
Sexuality	5	4	3	2	1	9
Communication	5	4	3	2	1	9
Family planning	5	4	3	2	1	9
Christian marriage	5	4	3	2	1	9
Coping with change	5	4	3	2	1	9
Conflict resolution	5	4	3	2	1	9
Aspects of personality	5	4	3	2	1	9
Spirituality	5	4	3	2	1	9
Legal aspects of marriage	5	4	3	2	1	9
Stress management	5	4	3	2	1	9

Other (please specify)

_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1

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4.

How helpful were each of the following activities or approaches for your (relationship)?

* Use the rating scale below and circle the numbers which apply to you

5 = Very helpful
4 = Helpful
3 = Neither helpful nor unhelpful
2 = Unhelpful
1 = Very unhelpful

9 = Not applicable

Lectures/talks	5	4	3	2	1	9
Role plays	5	4	3	2	1	9
PREPARE	5	4	3	2	1	9
Interaction with your partner	5	4	3	2	1	9
Interaction with other couples	5	4	3	2	1	9
Small group work	5	4	3	2	1	9
Large group work	5	4	3	2	1	9
Guest speakers	5	4	3	2	1	9
Exercise sheets/workbooks	5	4	3	2	1	9
Overhead transparencies	5	4	3	2	1	9
FOCCUS	5	4	3	2	1	9
Videos	5	4	3	2	1	9

Other (please specify)

_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1
_____	5	4	3	2	1

5.

(a) Participating in programs like pre-marriage education can make a difference in how people think about their relationship and marriage. Have your ideas about the marriage you desired changed as a result of participating in this program?

* Please circle the number below which best represents how much your ideas have changed

A great deal	Somewhat	Not at all
1	2	3

(b) If your ideas have changed at all, please describe how they have changed

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6.

(a) Now think about your (relationship). Have your ideas about your relationship changed as a result of participating in this program?

* Please circle the number below which best represents how much your relationship has changed

A great deal	Somewhat	Not at all
1	2	3

(b) If your relationship has changed at all, please describe how it has changed

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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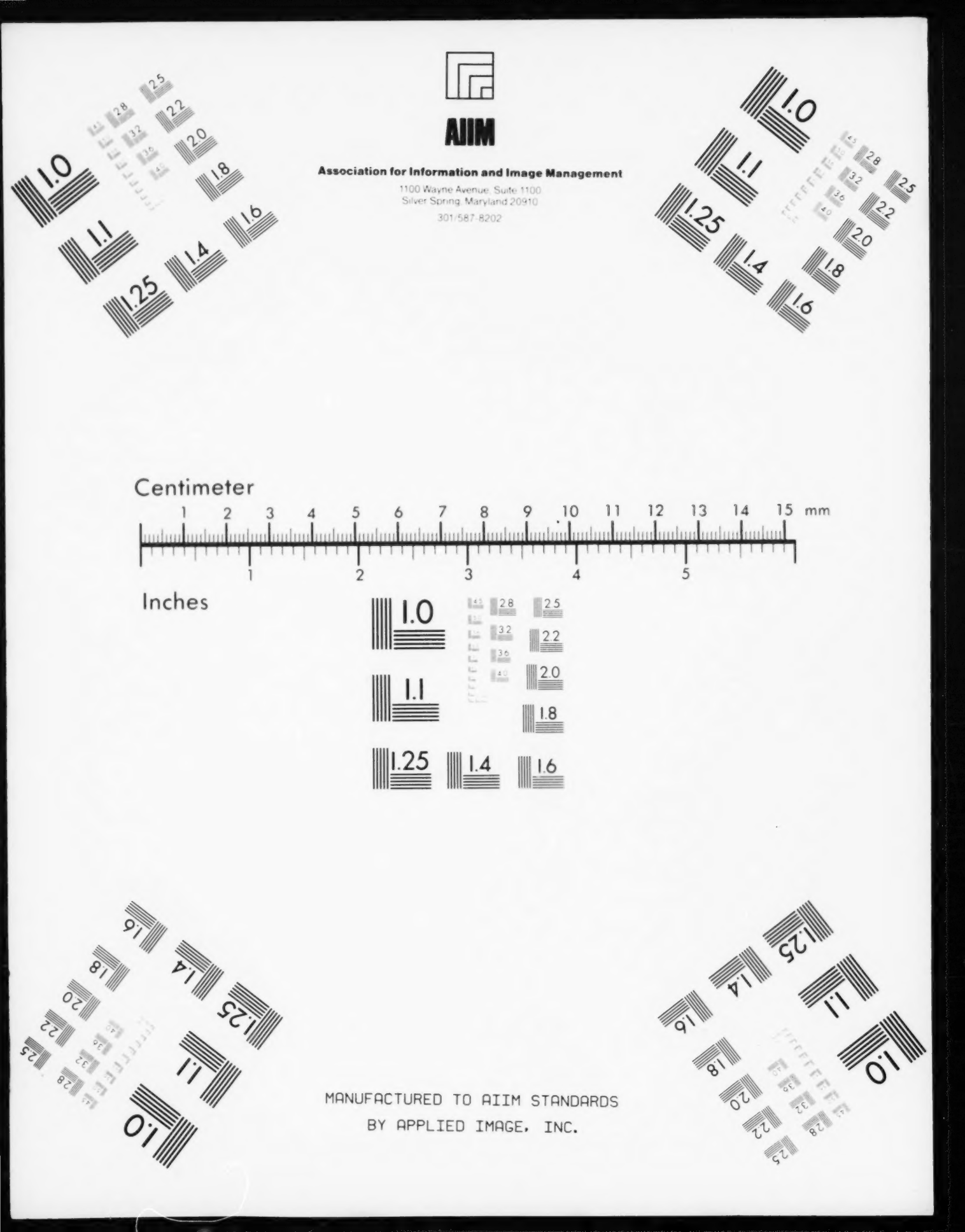
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7.

Thinking back on your expectations of the program you have attended, how well did the program match up with your expectations?

* Circle the number which best corresponds to you

Very well	Well	Fairly well	Not very well	Not at all
1	2	3	4	5

8.

What were the three most important results of attending the pre-marriage education program for your relationship?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

9.

Were there any new issues that were raised for you or your partner as a result of the pre-marriage education program?

(Circle) Yes No

If yes please describe what they were _____

_____

_____

_____

10.

Do you think that you have learned any skills in this program that would be useful for your future marriage? (Circle) Yes No

If yes, which skills have you learned? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11.

How strongly would you recommend this program to other couples you know?

* Please circle the number below which best represents your feelings

Very strongly	Strongly	Fairly strongly	Only a little	Not at all
1	2	3	4	5

12.

Who do you think will take primary responsibility for the following tasks and roles in your future marriage?

* Please circle the response which best suits your ideas for each of the following items.

	I will do this all the time	I will mainly do this	We will both do like	My partner will mainly do this	My partner will do this all the time	Uncertain
Making financial decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6
Playing with the children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Maintaining the household	1	2	3	4	5	6
Disciplining the children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cleaning the house	1	2	3	4	5	6
Initiating sexual intimacy	1	2	3	4	5	6
Doing the grocery shopping	1	2	3	4	5	6
Caring for children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Settling arguments	1	2	3	4	5	6
Doing the laundry	1	2	3	4	5	6
Inviting guests to the home	1	2	3	4	5	6
Taking initiative for spiritual life	1	2	3	4	5	6
Earning the income	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cooking the meals	1	2	3	4	5	6
Acting as spokesperson for the family	1	2	3	4	5	6
Deciding how leisure time should be spent	1	2	3	4	5	6
Making major family decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6

13.

Most couples have some areas of disagreement in their relationship.
Please indicate the amount of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner at the present time.

* Circle the number which applies to you in each of the following items.
Use the scale below for your ratings.

7 = Always agree
6 = Frequently agree
5 = Occasionally agree
4 = Uncertain
3 = Occasionally disagree
2 = Frequently disagree
1 = Always disagree

9 = Not applicable

Handling finances	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Leisure time interests and recreation activities	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Friends	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Aims, goals and things believed important	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Amount of time spent together	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Ways of dealing with parents and future in laws	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Making major decisions	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Household tasks	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Showing affection	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Work matters	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Sexual intimacy	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Amount of time spent on individual interests	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Drinking/drug use habits	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Handling conflicts	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Raising children	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Religious beliefs	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9

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14.

How committed are you and your partner to seeing your relationship continue?

	Yourself	Your partner
Very committed	1	5
Mostly committed	2	6
Somewhat committed	3	7
Not at all committed	4	8

If your commitment has changed since you began your pre-marriage program, can you describe how it has changed?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

15.

How committed are you to marrying your partner?

Very committed	1
Mostly committed	2
Somewhat committed	3
Not at all committed	4

If your commitment has changed since you began the program, can you describe in what way it has changed?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

16.

If you were unable to solve a specific problem in your marriage, would you consider seeking professional help? (Circle) Yes No

17.

Overall how would you rate the quality of the program you have just attended?

Please circle the number that best represents your rating

Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	2	3	4	5

18.

Is there anything which you would like to see changed in this pre marriage education program? Please describe these changes and why they would be useful

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

19.

Here are some statements about yourself, your partner and your relationship at the present time.

* Circle the response that comes closest to how you feel for each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with myself as a person	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with my partner as a person	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with our ability to communicate	1	2	3	4	5
I express concern and warmth towards my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to express myself openly to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my partner's likes and dislikes	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to listen to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I trust my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I feel intimate with my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am confident in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5
We are able to handle our disagreements constructively	1	2	3	4	5
We are satisfied with our level of intimacy	1	2	3	4	5
I have difficulty in talking to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to express positive feelings to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to express negative feelings to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to share my personal concerns with my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to believe and accept positive feelings my partner expresses towards me	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to deal constructively with negative feelings my partner expresses towards me	1	2	3	4	5
I have an understanding of the kind of relationship I want to have in the future with my partner	1	2	3	4	5

20.

Thinking about your relationship, would you agree or disagree with the following statements?

* Circle the response that comes closest to how you feel for each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My partner sees me as a satisfactory partner	1	2	3	4	5
My partner sees him or herself as a satisfactory partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am clearly aware of my partner's needs and desires	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my own feelings	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my own needs and desires in this relationship	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my partner's feelings	1	2	3	4	5
I feel accepted as a person by my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I consider my partner to be my best friend	1	2	3	4	5
I get as much as I give in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5
I maintain separate activities of my own	1	2	3	4	5
I have interests that are different from my partner's	1	2	3	4	5
I keep certain things private from my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I let my partner have his / her own way	1	2	3	4	5
I let my partner know my fears and weaknesses	1	2	3	4	5
I encourage my partner to discuss feelings	1	2	3	4	5
I feel free to be myself with my partner	1	2	3	4	5

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In order to know whether this pre-marriage education program has been useful to you and your relationship, we would like to contact you in three months time to see how things are going.

Would you be willing to complete a three month follow-up questionnaire?
(Please circle)

Yes

No

If yes, please give the following details.

Names: _____

_____

Address where we can be sure of contacting you (e.g. parent's or close friend's address)

_____

_____

_____

Signatures_____

_____

To assist us with matching your answers to your partner's answers, please place your initials and your partner's initials in the boxes below.

Your initials

Your partner's initials

Thankyou for completing this questionnaire.

Please put the questionnaire in the envelope provided to ensure confidentiality, and return it to the Educator who will mail it to the Research Team at the University of South Australia.

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Appendix E

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CATHOLIC SOCIETY FOR MARRIAGE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR MARRIAGE EDUCATION

SURVEY OF

PRE-MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

1992

PART III

This survey is being conducted to collect information about Pre-Marriage Education Programs across Australia. Your assistance in completing this questionnaire would be greatly appreciated. Your answers will be kept confidential.
Most questions require you to tick a box, or circle a response. There are some questions that will require brief written answers.

Three months have gone by since your participation in a pre marriage education program and during this time some changes may have taken place in your life. This questionnaire is designed to trace some of these possible changes.

1.

Are you still in the same relationship as you were before the pre marriage education program?

* Circle the appropriate response and read the directions following

Yes (If yes, answer the remaining questions)
No (If no, answer question 14 only)

2.

Are you now married?

Yes (If yes, answer 2a. below)
No (If no, answer 2b. below and complete all following questions)

2a. How long have you been married? _____ months (Go to 3. below and complete all following questions)

2b. Are you still planning to be married?

Yes (If yes, answer 2c. below and the following questions)
No (If no, answer question 14 only)

2c. How long before you will be married? _____ months (Please complete the rest of the questions in this booklet)

3.

(a) Have your ideas about the marriage you desired changed as a result of your participating in the pre-marriage education program?

* Circle the number below which shows how much your ideas have been changed

A great deal	Somewhat	Not at all
1	2	3

(b) If your ideas were changed at all, please describe how they have changed

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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Love, Sex and Watership

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4.

(a) In your opinion, has the quality of your relationship changed as a result of your participation in the pre-marriage education program?

* Circle the number below which shows how much your relationship has been changed.

A great deal	Somewhat	Not at all
1	2	3

(b) If your relationship has changed at all, please describe how it has changed.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5.

Please describe the three most important results of attending the pre marriage education program for your relationship.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

6.

Please describe any specific aspects of the program which helped you to understand your relationship.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

7.

Who do you think will take primary responsibility for the following tasks and roles in your (future) marriage?

* Please circle the response which best suits your ideas for each of the following items.

	I will do this all the time	I will mainly do this	We will both do this	My partner will mainly do this	My partner will do this all the time	Decision
Making financial decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6
Playing with the children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Maintaining the household	1	2	3	4	5	6
Disciplining the children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cleaning the house	1	2	3	4	5	6
Initiating sexual intimacy	1	2	3	4	5	6
Doing the grocery shopping	1	2	3	4	5	6
Caring for children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Settling arguments	1	2	3	4	5	6
Doing the laundry	1	2	3	4	5	6
Inviting guests to the home	1	2	3	4	5	6
Taking initiative for spiritual life	1	2	3	4	5	6
Earning the income	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cooking the meals	1	2	3	4	5	6
Acting as spokesperson for the family	1	2	3	4	5	6
Deciding how leisure time should be spent	1	2	3	4	5	6
Making major family decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6

8.

Were there any new issues that were raised for you or your partner as a result of the pre marriage education program?

* Circle the appropriate response Yes No

If yes, what were they?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9.

Most people have some areas of disagreement in their relationship.
Could you indicate the amount of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner about these issues at the present time?

* Circle the response that best suits you. Please include answers to all statements.

	Always Agree	Frequently Agree	Occasionally Agree	Uncertain	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Always Disagree	Does Not Apply
Handling finances	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Leisure time interests and recreation activities	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Friends	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Aims, goals and things believed important	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Amount of time spent together	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Ways of dealing with parents and in-laws	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Making major decisions	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Household tasks	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Showing affection	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Work matters	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Sexual intimacy	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Amount of time spent on individual interests	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Dinking/drug use habits	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Handling conflicts	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Raising children	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9
Religious beliefs	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	9

10.

These statements ask how you feel about yourself, your partner and your relationship at the present time.

* Circle the response that comes closest to how you feel. Please provide answers to all statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with myself as a person	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with my partner as a person	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with our ability to communicate	1	2	3	4	5
I express concern and warmth towards my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to express myself openly to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my partner's likes and dislikes	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to listen to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I trust my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I feel intimate with my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am confident in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5
We are able to handle our disagreements constructively	1	2	3	4	5
We are satisfied with our level of intimacy	1	2	3	4	5
I have difficulty in talking to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to express positive feelings to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to express negative feelings to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to share my personal concerns with my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to believe and accept positive feelings my partner expresses towards me	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to deal constructively with negative feelings my partner expresses towards me	1	2	3	4	5
I have an understanding of the kind of relationship I want to have in the future with my partner	1	2	3	4	5

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11.

Thinking about your relationship now, would you agree or disagree with the following statements?

* Circle the response that comes closest to how you feel. Please include answers to all statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My partner sees me as a satisfactory partner	1	2	3	4	5
My partner sees him or herself as a satisfactory partner	1	2	3	4	5
I am clearly aware of my partner's needs and desires	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my own feelings	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my own needs and desires in the relationship	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my partner's feelings	1	2	3	4	5
I feel accepted as a person by my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I consider my partner to be my best friend	1	2	3	4	5
I get as much as I give in our relationship	1	2	3	4	5
I maintain separate activities of my own	1	2	3	4	5
I have interests that are different from my partner's	1	2	3	4	5
I keep certain things private from my partner	1	2	3	4	5
I let my partner have his / her own way	1	2	3	4	5
I let my partner know my fears and weaknesses	1	2	3	4	5
I encourage my partner to discuss feelings	1	2	3	4	5
I feel free to be myself with my partner	1	2	3	4	5

12.

Did you think that you learned any skills during your pre-marriage education program that have been useful for your marriage/relationship?

(Circle) Yes No

If yes, which skills did you learn?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

13.

IF YOU ARE NOW MARRIED...

How useful do you think the pre-marriage education program was for your marriage?

* Circle the number which best corresponds to you

Very useful	Fairly useful	A little useful	Not at all useful
1	2	3	4

Please feel free to comment further in the space below

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14.

In question 2(b) you indicated that you were no longer planning to marry.

Did your participation in the pre-marriage education program influence this decision?

*Circle the appropriate response Yes No

If you think the program had some effect on your decision please describe this

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

To assist us with matching your answers to your partner's answers, please tick the appropriate box

Female

Male

Thank you for completing the questionnaire and participating in this research project. Your time and efforts are very much appreciated.

Please put this questionnaire in the stamped envelope provided and post it to the Research Team at the University of South Australia.

Appendix F

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CATHOLIC SOCIETY FOR MARRIAGE EDUCATION

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR MARRIAGE EDUCATION

SURVEY OF

PRE-MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

1992

PART IV

THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS TO BE COMPLETED BY

THE MARRIAGE EDUCATOR

This survey is being conducted to collect information about Pre-Marriage Education programs across Australia. Your assistance in completing this questionnaire would be greatly appreciated. Your answers will be kept confidential. Most questions require you to tick a box, or circle a response. There are some questions that will require brief written answers.

1.

As an educator, how satisfied were you with the following aspects of the administration of the program you have just led?

- Circle the number which applies to you:

5 = Very satisfied
4 = Satisfied
3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
2 = Dissatisfied
1 = Very dissatisfied

9 = Does not apply

The amount of pre-course contact participants received	5	4	3	2	1	9
Adequacy of pre-course information participants received	5	4	3	2	1	9
The amount of fees charged	5	4	3	2	1	9
Location of the course	5	4	3	2	1	9
The referral process	5	4	3	2	1	9
Length of the program	5	4	3	2	1	9
The times when the program was offered	5	4	3	2	1	9
Any arrangements for post-course follow-up or referral	5	4	3	2	1	9

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2.

As an educator, how satisfied were you with the content of the program you have just led?

- Circle the number which applies to you:

5 = Very satisfied
4 = Satisfied
3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
2 = Dissatisfied
1 = Very dissatisfied

9 = Does not apply

Family of Origin	5	4	3	2	1	9
Finance/Budgeting	5	4	3	2	1	9
Marital Roles	5	4	3	2	1	9
Expectations of Marriage	5	4	3	2	1	9
Sexuality	5	4	3	2	1	9
Communication	5	4	3	2	1	9
Family Planning	5	4	3	2	1	9
Christian Marriage	5	4	3	2	1	9
Coping with Change	5	4	3	2	1	9
Conflict Resolution	5	4	3	2	1	9
Aspects of Personality	5	4	3	2	1	9
Spirituality	5	4	3	2	1	9
Legal Aspects of Marriage	5	4	3	2	1	9
Stress Management	5	4	3	2	1	9

Other (please specify)

.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1

3.

As an educator, how satisfied were you with the types of educational processes used in the program?

- Circle the number which applies to you:

5 = Very satisfied
4 = Satisfied
3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
2 = Dissatisfied
1 = Very dissatisfied

9 = Does not apply

Lectures/talks	5	4	3	2	1	9
Role plays	5	4	3	2	1	9
PREPARE	5	4	3	2	1	9
Interaction between individual couples	5	4	3	2	1	9
Small group work	5	4	3	2	1	9
Large group work	5	4	3	2	1	9
Guest speakers	5	4	3	2	1	9
Exercise sheets/workbooks	5	4	3	2	1	9
Overhead transparencies	5	4	3	2	1	9
XXXXX	5	4	3	2	1	9
Videos	5	4	3	2	1	9

Other (please specify)

.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1

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4

Give an estimation of how helpful you believe the material in each of these segments would have been for the couples' understanding of their relationship.

• Use the scale below for your opinions:

5 = Very helpful
4 = Helpful
3 = Neither helpful nor unhelpful
2 = Unhelpful
1 = Very unhelpful

9 = Does not apply

Family of Origin	5	4	3	2	1	9
Finance/Budgeting	5	4	3	2	1	9
Marital Roles	5	4	3	2	1	9
Expectations of Marriage	5	4	3	2	1	9
Sexuality	5	4	3	2	1	9
Communication	5	4	3	2	1	9
Family Planning	5	4	3	2	1	9
Christian Marriage	5	4	3	2	1	9
Coping with Change	5	4	3	2	1	9
Conflict Resolution	5	4	3	2	1	9
Aspects of Personality	5	4	3	2	1	9
Spirituality	5	4	3	2	1	9
Legal aspects of Marriage	5	4	3	2	1	9
Stress Management	5	4	3	2	1	9

Other (please specify)

.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1

5

How helpful do you think each of the following activities were to the couples' understanding of their relationship?

• Use the scale below for your opinions:

5 = Very helpful
4 = Helpful
3 = Neither helpful nor unhelpful
2 = Unhelpful
1 = Very unhelpful

9 = Does not apply

Lectures/talks	5	4	3	2	1	9
Role Plays	5	4	3	2	1	9
PREPARE	5	4	3	2	1	9
Interaction with partner	5	4	3	2	1	9
Interaction with other couples	5	4	3	2	1	9
Small group work	5	4	3	2	1	9
Large group work	5	4	3	2	1	9
Guest speakers	5	4	3	2	1	9
Exercise sheets/workbooks	5	4	3	2	1	9
Overhead transparencies	5	4	3	2	1	9
FOCCUS	5	4	3	2	1	9
Videos	5	4	3	2	1	9

Other (please specify)

.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1
.....	5	4	3	2	1

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6

How helpful do you think the pre-marriage education program has been in helping couples to develop the following skills?

* Use the following rating scale for your responses:

5 = Very helpful
4 = Helpful
3 = Neither helpful nor unhelpful
2 = Unhelpful
1= Very unhelpful

9 = Does not apply

Communicating ideas to partner	5	4	3	2	1	9
Listening to partner	5	4	3	2	1	9
Expressing positive feelings	5	4	3	2	1	9
Communicating needs to partner	5	4	3	2	1	9
Resolving conflict constructively	5	4	3	2	1	9
Self-expression	5	4	3	2	1	9
Communicating interests	5	4	3	2	1	9
Expressing negative feelings	5	4	3	2	1	9
Accepting positive feelings	5	4	3	2	1	9
Understanding partner	5	4	3	2	1	9
Accepting negative feelings	5	4	3	2	1	9
Budgeting	5	4	3	2	1	9
Managing stress	5	4	3	2	1	9
Other (please specify)						
.....	5	4	3	2	1	
.....	5	4	3	2	1	
.....	5	4	3	2	1	
.....	5	4	3	2	1	
.....	5	4	3	2	1	

7

(a). How much do you think the program has led to a change in the quality of the relationship for the couples?

* Circle the appropriate number below:

Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Quite a lot	Very much
1	2	3	4	5

(b). In your estimation, what proportion of the group of couples experienced this change?

* Please mark the line to represent how many couples you believe experienced this change:

None — About half the couples — All

(c). What evidence (e.g specific examples of couples' behaviour) could you give to highlight the judgements you have made in (a) and (b) above?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

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8

(a). How much do you think the program has led to a change in the ideas of the type of marriage that couples would like to have?

* Circle the appropriate number below:

Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Quite a lot	Very much
1	2	3	4	5

(b). In your estimation, what proportion of the group of couples experienced this change?

* Please mark the line to represent how many couples you believe experienced this change:

None — About half the couples — All

(c). What evidence (e.g specific examples of couples' behaviour) could you give to highlight the judgements you have made in (a) and (b) above?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

9

(a). How much do you think the program has led to a change in the commitment to marriage of the couples?

* Circle the appropriate number below:

Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Quite a lot	Very much
1	2	3	4	5

(b). In your estimation, what proportion of the group of couples experienced this change?

* Please mark the line to represent how many couples you believe experienced this change:

None — About half the couples — All

(c). What evidence (e.g specific examples of couples' behaviour) could you give to highlight the judgements you have made in (a) and (b) above?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

10.

What do you think were the three most important educational outcomes for the couples participating in the pre-marriage education program?

1.

2.

3.

11.

Is there anything you would like to see changed in the program you have just left? Please describe these changes and indicate why they would be useful.

Appendix G

Table 10
Satisfaction with the organisation of the program by age group

	Age group						
Satisfaction Group	1 (16-20)	2 (21-25)	3 (26-30)	4 (31-35)	5 (36-40)	6 (41+)	Total
1	1	1	1	0	1	0	4
2	6	32	25	10	1	0	74
3	39	402	227	51	8	1	728
4	38	240	105	34	10	6	433
Total	84	675	358	95	20	7	1239

(chi-square = 43.11777, d.f.=21, p<0.01)

Table 12
Satisfaction with program structure and experiences by age group

	Age group						
Satisfaction Group	1 (16-20)	2 (21-25)	3 (26-30)	4 (31-35)	5 (36-40)	6 (41+)	Total
1	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
2	1	1	3	2	1	0	8
3	3	23	14	4	0	0	44
4	13	90	66	25	5	1	200
5	42	363	192	45	8	2	652
6	25	197	82	18	6	4	332
Total	84	675	357	95	20	7	1238

(Chi-square = 48.46132, d.f.=35, p=0.06)

Table 14
Current living arrangements by helpfulness of topics to the couples' relationships

	Current living arrangements				
Helpfulness Group	Alone	With parents	With partner	With Others	Total
1	0	0	1	0	1
2	0	6	1	2	9
3	5	15	20	6	46
4	13	52	38	20	123
5	49	140	130	52	371
6	53	252	155	63	523
7	15	89	38	16	158
Total	135	554	383	159	1231

(Chi-square = 29.74, d.f. = 18, p<0.05)

Table 16
Helpfulness of activities to relationship by relationship length

	Relationship length group						
Helpfulness Group	1 (1-10)	2 (11-20)	3 (21-30)	4 (31-40)	5 (41-50)	6 (51+)	Total
1	6	11	7	7	7	5	43
2	17	30	35	35	10	53	180
3	35	96	117	87	55	115	505
4	27	86	90	62	51	105	421
5	9	18	15	6	7	26	81
Total	94	241	264	197	130	304	1230

(Chi-square = 68.14756, d.f. = 48, $p<0.05$)

Table 17
Helpfulness of activities to relationship by age group

	Age group						
Helpfulness Group	1 (16-20)	2 (21-25)	3 (26-30)	4 (31-35)	5 (36-40)	6 (41+)	Total
1	1	19	13	8	1	2	44
2	10	105	46	19	3	0	183
3	28	247	177	43	9	1	505
4	38	252	106	21	4	3	424
5	8	50	17	3	3	1	82
Total	85	673	359	94	20	7	1238

(Chi-square = 77.50245, d.f.=28, $p<0.01$)

Appendix H

Table 23: Average relationship quality calculated across the three phases of the questionnaire

	Mean	Standard deviation
Time 1	145.16	12.56
Time 2	144.88	15.08
Time 3	148.70	11.79

Statistics:
Time 1 - Time 2: t=0.26, d.f.=1236, p>.05, n.s.
Time 2 - Time 3: t=2.56, d.f.=203, p<0.05
Time 1 - Time 3: t=4.51, d.f.=193, p<.01

Table 24: Relationship change scale factors

T-test values and related statistical significance levels for RCS factors from Time 1 to Time 2.

	t-value	d.f.	significance
Understanding	8.10	1235	p<0.01
Trust	3.44	1229	p<0.01
Openness	8.09	1228	p<0.01
Communication	23.45	1231	p<0.01
Independence	2.21	1229	p<0.05
Personal Satisfaction	8.02	1229	p<0.01
Relationship Satisfaction	8.89	1231	p<0.01

T-test values and related statistical significance levels for RCS factors from Time 2 to Time 3.

	t-value	d.f	significance
Understanding	0.31	202	p<0.01
Trust	0.78	202	n.s.
Openness	0.05	202	n.s.
Communication	12.72	203	p<0.01
Independence	0.76	202	n.s.
Personal Satisfaction	1.28	202	n.s.
Relationship Satisfaction	0.86	203	n.s.

T-test values and related statistical significance levels for RCS factors from Time 1 to Time 3.

	t-value	d.f.	significance
Understanding	4.94	193	p<0.01
Trust	2.43	193	p<0.05
Openness	4.68	193	p<0.01
Communication	3.94	193	p<0.01
Independence	0.30	193	n.s.
Personal Satisfaction	1.28	202	n.s.
Relationship Satisfaction	4.36	193	p<0.01

Table 26: Average scores on the Marital Consensus Scale calculated across the three phases of the questionnaire.

	Mean	Standard deviation
Time 1	85.13	15.52
Time 2	88.77	14.91
Time 3	93.20	13.06

Statistics:
Time 1 - Time 2: t=9.66, d.f.=1231, p<.01,
Time 2 - Time 3: t=4.38, d.f.=202, p<.01
Time 1 - Time 3: t=7.44, d.f.=192, p<.01

Table 27: Average scores for the Marital Consensus Scale at Time 3 for married versus unmarried

	Mean	Standard deviation
Married	94.67	10.53
Unmarried	90.22	19.76

Statistics:
Married v. Unmarried: t=1.62, d.f.=76, p>.05, n.s.

Love, Sex and Waterskiing is a book about Australian couples' experiences of pre-marriage education based on a national research project begun in late 1991. The project involved nearly 1000 couples who had attended such programs in the first three months of 1992. They were asked to reflect on what they thought about marriage, how they experienced the pre-marriage programs they had attended and what kinds of differences they experienced as a result of the programs. The title is derived from one participant's views on the benefits of marriage given in response to a questionnaire to couples in the survey.

Couples in the survey stressed two major benefits of the programs they had attended. The first was *introductory training skill in communication and conflict management*. The second was the opportunity for couples *to reflect on themselves and the marriage they want*. The overwhelming recommendation from most couples is to promote these programs widely so that every couple contemplating marriage has the chance to share this experience.

Love, Sex and Waterskiing is written for human relations and marriage educators and counsellors, clergy, human service providers, administrators and interested students of marriage and life transition learning.

The research team: Roger Harris, Michele Simons, Peter Willis and Anne Barrie are based at the Centre for Human Resource Studies at the University of South Australia. Roger and Peter teach in the Centre. Roger has a long interest and experience in teaching and research in adult education and training and is also a member of a marriage education team in Adelaide. Peter's research interest is in adult education for personal and social change. He coordinates a network of adult educators of similar interest in the Australian Association for Adult and Community Education. Michele is senior marriage educator with Catholic Family Services in Adelaide and current president of the Catholic Society for Marriage Education. Anne is a research psychologist and statistical analyst attached to the project.

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